

FUSION FANTASTIC STORY

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ARENA

아레나
이계사냥기

도서출판
책아람

Arena

– 이계사냥기 –

- Part 1 -

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- STORY -

A 29 year old civil employment exam student wakes up in a blank white room and meets a baby angel. This baby angel informs him that he died in his sleep due to heart disease like his father and grandfather. Remembering his mom and their last conversation he says that he will take on a series of life and death tests that the baby angel offers him. From this point on he must put his life on the line and fight in the stage called 'Arena'. And Every time he clears a test he will gain abilities and weapons to increase his strength. All to clear the tests and get his life back. This is his story of his fights in the 'Arena'.

Chapter 1

Hyun-Ho Kim (Part 1)

There are 7 billion people on the planet.

I suppose that of those people, crazy drunkards make up about 3 billion. I wish those 3 billion people would die. I really do.

Today's late night part time work at the convenience store was particularly difficult.

At around 1 AM, a drunken buffoon of a man began to down a bunch of beers all by himself.

Plenty drunk and without even paying, he began to try and eat chips, ice cream, and dried squid.

When I told him to pay and tried to stop him, he started swearing that even someone like me was looking down on him, going so far as to throw punches my way...

I thought about calling the police, but that seemed like more of a hassle so I instead just calmed the man down.

Tired from his angry fit, the man left sobbing. His life must be shit too. The sight of him walking away was so pitiful.

Even so, that doesn't give him the right to make my life shit too, right?

I finished my shift and came home.

My dark and spooky one-room basement.

A deposit of 5,000,000 won (USD \$5000) and monthly rent 300,000 won (USD \$300).

It's cold in the fall, colder in the winter, and interestingly enough, this dungeon of mine is still cold on summer nights. As an option, it also floods.

I threw off my clothes and crawled under my thick blankets. Even though it's cold because there's no heating, I'm a weird bastard that can't change my habit of sleeping naked.

I'm about to fall asleep when my smart phone starts buzzing from a phone call.

The notice says it's my mom.

"Awesome"

The end to a difficult day is mom. She's obviously calling to nag me.

"Eh, fuck it"

I decided not to pick up the phone. I can just tell her I fell asleep after work and didn't get the call.

As the vibrations stopped I figured my mom gave up on the call when this time there was a ding-dong, alerting me to a text message.

[Son, don't pretend to be sleeping. Pick up the phone. If you don't, your allowance will get cut]

...Oh.

But of course.

As soon as the phone rang, I picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Son, why didn't you pick up the phone?"

"Cuz I was pretending to sleep."

"Really? Our son is such a hyoja.*"

(TL: A good child; a child that takes care of their parents)

"Well, you know."

“Allowance. CUT.”

Stringing me around using money again. You think this make me tuck my tail between my legs?

“I’m sorry”

It will. I tucked it real fast. Mom laughed.

“And are you studying well?”

“I just got back from work. I’ll do it when I wake up.”

“A 2nd year examinee and you can still sleep?”

“Stop poking where it hurts.”

“Son, don’t misconstrue it, just listen to what mom has to say. My son’s head is a rock and I don’t think your life was meant to spend studying. Why don’t you just come home and run the fried chicken store with mom?”

A fastball, out of the blue.

It’s a targeted statement with no room for misunderstanding.

With a shock, I stutter a reply.

“Uh, mom. It’s because I don’t study, but my head is good”

“That’s what I thought too, two years ago. But now I won’t burden you with useless expectations. Even if the child doesn’t go to school, the job of a good parent would be to find the job that suits their child.”

Her tone was telling me that the job that suited me was the fried chicken business.

I felt fear and quickly replied.

“Mom... why not give me another chance. If I fail the exam this time, I will spend the rest of my life frying chicken like you want me to.”

"Of course. Son, next year you will be 30. The next door convenience store owner's daughter is two years younger than you and is already married with two kids. Do you know how much the convenience store owners brag about their grandchildren?"

"Again with that."

That fat old lady from the convenience store. She must've bragged about her grandchildren to mom again.

"I wonder when my son will meet a girl and get married..."

"How about I figure out my own life a little first, then we can talk about a daughter-in-law and grandchildren again."

What crazy girl would like a 29 year old examinee bastard?

"So just forget everything and come home to the fried chick-"

"I'm gonna to hang up now"

I pressed the end call button and speedily took out the battery too.

Fried chicken, 30 years old, daughter-in-law, grandchildren, fried chicken again. It's the fearsome combo that always knocks me down. Who wants to live their life frying chicken?

I'm in no way looking down on the fried chicken business.

My mom sold those fried chickens at a flaming pace to send her all her three kids to college.

But I hate hard work.

I just want to be an government official.

I want live my life drudging off to work, getting a steady paycheck, and getting home every night on the dot like clockwork.

In my frustration, I let out a sigh. I dug deep into my blankets and closed my eyes.

I could feel the frustration on the fringes of my chest. A closing up and closing in kind of oppressiveness.

Aw, hell, this is all just from stress.

It'll all be better after I get a good night's rest.

And so I fell asleep.

...and so I dreamed.

Chapter 2

Kim Hyun-ho (Part 2)

When I came to, I was in a completely empty world.

What nonsense am I spewing?

I mean exactly that. It was an empty world with nothing in it.

There was no grass, trees, and no colors here. The sky and the earth were all white. The infinite view was full of just empty space. It was a rather eerie atmosphere.

It felt as if the unending vastness of white was piercing into my mind as well.

"Wh-what the hell is this place?"

How could nothing exist? It was as if the whole world had been erased!

I looked around in utter shock.

...I never knew that having nothing to look around at would be this frightening.

'It's a dream.'

That was my conclusion.

Because it was a situation that couldn't be explained if this wasn't a dream.

'It's been a while since I've had a lucid dream. But man, this is a shitty dream.'

Since it wasn't a particularly enjoyable dream, I made up my mind to try and wake up. Every dream has a way of waking up from it. I put both my hands down on the white ground and bent down. Then...

"FUCK!"

Bang!

“AHHH!”

I rolled around on the ground holding onto my face from having banged it on the bare ground.

“Aishi, why is it so hard.”

(*TL: Korean slang that can mean damn, what the hell, etc. Pronounced kind of like the letters ‘A + C’ or ‘I + C’*)

The white ground was as hard as marble. At the very least, I was sure it was harder than my head.

It was then.

“Nice to meet you, examinee Hyun-Ho Kim.”

“WHAT?!”

It was the loud and resounding voice of an energetic young child.

I was surprised and startled.

I looked all around, but could not find the owner to the voice.

‘Perhaps a ghost?’

I was creeped out at the thought of an old hag. I screamed from the fear crawling within me.

(*TL: Old Hag refers to a belief that when you’re sleeping, an old hag sits on your chest, not letting you move. Also known as sleep paralysis*)

“Where are you? Show yourself!”

“But I’m right here.”

The voice came from above. I lifted my head and stared into the sky.

My mind went blank.

“An angel?”

There was no other explanation. It was an angel, as if it dropped out of a Michelangelo painting. He wasn’t wearing any clothes and his danglers between his legs made me quite uncomfortable.

“A real angel?”

“That I am.”

The baby angel dude with the bbundegi flapped his wings and descended.

(TL: *Bbundegi*: pronounced bun-de-gi. It’s pupa that are fried and eaten as a snack. In context... it’s a tiny dick lol)

Uh...

I’m baffled. An angel in my dream? I thought maybe, so I asked.

“Tell me the lotto numbers.”

“I don’t want to.”

Baby angel dude gave a sharp answer. His role is an angel and he’s a young ‘un, but real impertinent. I thought of spanking his ass but held it in.

“Alright, alright, fine. Just let me wake up from this dream.”

“It’s not a dream.”

“What?”

“You just verified that when you kissed the floor with your forehead.”

Those words made me alert.

“...you saw that?”

“Yup.”

The baby angel covered his mouth with both his hands and giggled.

“I saw that you were sensing it wasn’t a dream with the entirety of your skull.”

My face reddens.

‘Aww man, this is embarrassing. How could I have made such a scene!’

“When examinee Hyun-Ho Kim abused his skull, wouldn’t the pain have made him wake if this was a dream?”

The giggling bbundegi boy really called for a slap on the face.

The baby angel continued to speak.

“Or would you like to try one more time?”

“How?”

“Um, you mentioned the lotto numbers a moment ago?”

“Yeah. You gonna tell me?”

“No.”

This bbundegi bastard is upsetting me again.

“But instead I will let you experience something that will rival the chances of you winning the lottery.”

“What is that? The pension lottery*?”

“Seriously, you keep speaking in terms that give away your financial status.”

My blood starting boiling at this.

“...then what is it?”

“You wanna be hit by lightning?”

...Blank...

I was taken aback.

What did this bbundegi bastard just say to me? He can't even tell me the lotto numbers and now he wants to hit me with lightning?

“Not enough to die from, just barely a zing. Here we go~~~!”

“Wait, what?! I'm not...!”

Pijijik! (sound of lightning)

“Guakkk!”

Lightning fell down from the white sky. My body convulsed as if being fried in oil. This is how the chicken that gets fried by mom must feel!

“So, how is it?”

How is it?!

“You said it wasn't enough to kill?!”

I yelled out in fury from the likes of this kind of pain that I had never felt before. This hurt 100 times more than the anesthetic from a circumcision!

“If you were really struck with lightning, you would die without a moment to feel the pain. It hurts because it wasn't enough to kill.”

Spewing his nonsense, the baby angel bastard intently flapped his wings and approached me. He came forward with his annoying face and continued to speak.

“Do you think you could feel all this pain if this was a dream?”

“.....!”

The words pierce me deep in my chest.

An unknown uneasiness settled into my beating heart. If this is not a dream, where the hell am I?

“Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim.”

Wait.....

That bastard has been calling me examinee from the start, right? What does that even mean?

“Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim has been chosen by the heavens to take the exam.

“The Heavens?”

God/Deity*, Buddha*, Dao/Tao (The Way)*, The Truth*. Humans call them by specific names. However, A Name*, To Express In Words*, Humanity*, To Become A Human*, it is impossible within this dimensional space to explain what these things are in absoluteness.

‘What is he blabbing on about?’*

(TL: MC doesn't speak Chinese so he's confused too.)

The baby angel continued explain to me, who couldn't even begin to comprehend him.

“It's like God. For understanding purposes, I said deity.”

“So... in other words, Gods, ultimate powers, those kinds of things??”

“Yes.”

“What test?”

“The test is an extremely difficult and severe battle. It's a dangerous task where you could even die.”

“It's so difficult I could die?”

“Yes.”

“No. I won’t do it.”

I said it sternly.

Are these people crazy? God? Angel? Does that mean you can just do whatever?

I’m living nice and well and you give me a severe assignment and you think I’ll just take it up and do it?

The baby angel had a “I’m in a difficult position” expression on his face and said the following.

“But you have to do it...”

“Why are you asking me to do this kind of thing? God? Tell your God to do it. He’s God so he should be able to do it all, all the time.”

“I cannot tell you the ultimate goal of this test. Regardless, examinee Hyun-Ho Kim must do it.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want to.”

I’m saying no, so what can they do? With this mentality, I stood my ground.

The baby angel just stared at me blankly. Man, this kid’s dangling bbundegi keeps coming into my view.

“You really won’t do it?”

“That’s right, you bbundegi bastard.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“So much so that you would rather be hit by lightning?”

At the mention of lightning, I flinch. Is he threatening me? He’s pissing me off now.

“Yeah, yeah ya bastard. Even if my preciousness became as small as a bbundegi, I still

won't!"

"Oh dear... so that means even if you die, you won't do it?"

"Finally, you get it."

I looked at the baby angel proudly for finally understanding. He suddenly became a very worried baby angel.

"We are in no way forcing you but rather, giving you an opportunity... the choice is up to examinee Hyun-Ho Kim."

"Sure, thanks for the opportunity to possibly die in a severe battle. No thank you, kid."

"Whew, I guess there's no other choice. Then I'll be sending you on to hell..."

"Hell?"

I'm completely taken aback.

"Hey, what! Are you threatening me? You said it's not being demanded of me!"

"Of course, it is neither a threat nor a demand. You say you don't want to do the exam so according to the schedule, we are sending you to hell."

"Don't send me to hell! Send me back to the living world!"

The baby angel looks at me completely baffled.

"Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim... I thought it impossible but do you really not know?"

"Know what?"

"You have died. We only bring the dead to this place."

"...Huh?"

"You don't think we'd take a perfectly fine person and drag him here and threaten him, do you? As you can tell, I am an angel. I am not the devil."

The rush of anxiety.

Again, the suspicions that this must just be a bad dream.

"The cause of death for examinee Hyun-Ho Kim is heart disease. You went kaput while you were sleeping."

He speaks just like an angel.

"You expect me to believe that?"

"You were, of course, deep in sleep and thus unconscious for it."

"Other than getting hit by lightning by you, never in my life have I ever experienced anything close to death. How does it make sense that I never had any symptoms and then just went off in my sleep? Heart disease at my age?"

"You should have felt some pressure and uneasiness in your chest before you fell asleep..."

"...?!"

I'm completely surprised.

I remember.

I definitely felt that pressure in my chest.

"It's genetics. Didn't your ancestors also die of heart disease?"

Chapter 3

The First Exam (1)

“It’s genetics. Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s ancestors passed away from heart disease too, did they not?”

“Uh... that’s...”

I was so shocked I couldn’t even formulate a proper response. The baby angel wasn’t saying anything wrong. Father died of a heart attack. Mom had told me that even grandfather died of a heart attack so you should be careful too.

I asked with a shaky voice

“Am I really dead?”

“It’s a pity”

Flapping his wings like a little finch, the baby angel tried to console me.

It wasn’t consoling me at all.

But I’m only 29. Born as a man and I haven’t done anything.

I didn’t have a great job, and no family to look after. I’m still a virgin! If I die, what about my family?! What about mom?!

At the thought of mom, I began breaking down.

After father passed away like he did, mom raised us three kids with a lot of difficulty.

I disappointed her this way and that way but I was still her hope.

So then what happens if even I die like this?

I wasn’t able to look after her properly once.

Then was that conversation I had the night before the last conversation I'll ever have with my mom...?

My life ends just like this?

"I can't just die like this!"

"Right?"

"Ok. What do I have to do? You said you would give me an opportunity? If I do as you say can I live again?"

"Of course. You think I'd swindle you? I'm an angel. An angel!"

The baby angel pounded his chest with a stern face.

...It's because he's this kind of angel that I can't trust him.

If a sexy lady angel had suddenly appeared, I would've trusted her right away.

"I'll do whatever it takes, so save me."

"Fine. Then do you swear that as an examinee, you will your best until the very end of all the exams?"

"Yes"

The baby angel smiled widely and clapped his hands

"Yahooooo. I congratulate you on becoming an examinee!"

"Congratulations my ass. But you just said all the exams? Are you telling me it's not just one exam?"

"Yes. It's just like any other exam, it's not just one question. Like your employment exam, you have to get through different levels to get to the end."

(TL: In Korea, you take an exam(s) and then an interview before you can get hired.)

To be hearing about that damn test again really makes me hate this bbundegi bastard.

“Isn’t that a bit extreme?”

“What is?”

“Well. I think it’s a little extreme that in order to live I have to do multiple exams where I might die!”

“Oh no. That isn’t true. Every time you finish an exam we give you a rest period of 10 days to 2 months.”

“Rest period?”

“Yes. During the rest period you may get that rest period’s amount of time back into reality”

“So speaking in easier terms, every time I clear an exam, my life extends from 10 days to 2 months?”

“That is correct”

“So then what happens if I die during an exam? Does my soul just vanish or...?”

“No, there is no such thing as that. You just end up going to the afterlife as planned. So really, you don’t lose anything.”

...yeah... there’s nothing to lose there.

“And every time you clear an exam, you get a prize. According to the prize, your life can be better than the life you had before and of course, the biggest prize comes when you have completed all the exams and you can come back to life.”

I don’t think the angel is lying to me. I mean of course he has that puny bbundegi attached between his legs, but he did call lightning from the sky. He also has wings on his back. Why would a guy like this grab me and try to trick me? I don’t know how hard the exams will be, but instead of going out so pitifully I might as well give it a shot

I will live again and see mom’s face.

“Alright then. From now on I’m going to tell you the rules of the exam. First, tell me about notepad retrieval.”

“Notepad retrieval? What is...”

BAM!

Suddenly in front of my eyes there is a board the size of a notepad

“Oh! What is this?”

In my surprise, I stared at the board hanging in the air. On the board the following things were written:

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 1

Karma: 0

Mission: Defeat the red ape

Time limit 30 minutes 0 seconds

“What is this?”

“In order to help the examinee understand, I have written down some simple details.”

“...ok I kinda get it but what is this class and karma stuff?”

“Class is examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s current rank. Karma, simply speaking, is your grade. So the better you do on the exam, the more points you can rack up”

“Are more points better?”

“Of course. After you clear the exam, with the karma you get you can get a prize. So the more karma you get, the bigger the prize.”

I thought carefully and asked again.

“Of the prizes I can get using the karma, are there things that will help me in later exams?”

"Well of course. You can gain good weapons, martial arts, magic, super powers. You have to use the karma well to increase you strength in order to complete all the exams."

And at the moment, the board disappeared into thin air.

"Eh?"

"If you leave the board alone long enough, it'll disappear on its own"

"Retrieve board"

As I said it, the board reappeared in front of my eyes

The baby angel let out a sly smile.

"The board is an ethereal object. Because it is an ethereal object, it won't get in the way and won't be visible to other people. If you throw it anywhere, it'll just disappear."

"Oh really?"

I took the board and threw it. The board made a parabola and swoosh, it disappeared.

'Oh. That's very interesting'

However, it's disappointing. Because it's an ethereal object, I can't use it as a shield or a weapon in an urgent situation.

The baby angel clapped his hands.

"Alright. Well now that you're all caught up, let's start the exam!"

"Wait!"

I quickly stop the angel.

"What do you mean I'm all caught up? You have to tell me what the red ape is before I do or don't do the exam you bbundegi bastard!"

"That you'll just have to figure out yourself."

“WHAT? You little shit. You should tell me if it’s an animal, a plant, or a bug.”

“Yeah... just be on your way”

He flicked his cute little finger at me.

And just then, right before my eyes, appeared a shabby door.

“This is the exam door”

“The exam door?”

“If you open that door, you’ll be entering Level Two of the arena. The arena is the stage where examinee Hyun-Ho Kim will take all of your exams”

“Arena...”

“Hurry and go through the door”

The baby angel flapped his wings and pushed my shoulder.

‘Alright I get it you bastard. Your uncircumcised self trying to tell me what to do.’

(TN: Being uncircumcised is like a sign on being uncivilized.)

I take a big gulp and grab the handle to the exam door.

Screeeeeeeeeeeeech

Through the crack of the open door, a bright light floods in.

It was so bright that I couldn’t see what was over the threshold of the door.

I hesitate for a moment and take one step and pray.

I am hoping that when I get past this door, I will awake from this dream. I want to be able to wake up complaining and laughing about this ridiculous dream.

Chapter 4

The First Exam (Part 2)

“OHHHH FUCK.”

Definitely not a dream. Instead of the one room basement that I should be sleeping in, an expansive forest welcomes me.

As if being expansive isn’t enough, it’s quite a disgusting forest.

The trees are so absurdly large that the sky can’t be seen. And vines bigger than my arms are coiled all around them. The energy of the wild permeates throughout. And with every step I take, I can feel the crunch of the weeds vividly on the bottom of my feet.

It has been a long time since I have walked barefoot

“...huh?”

Barefoot?

“WHAT? WHAT FUCKERY IS THIS?!”

I finally noticed how shitty my appearance was.

My body is bare, with nothing but black underwear on.

I’ve been brought here in what I fell asleep in.

In this expansive forest in nothing but my underwear. Am I fucking Tarzan? They should’ve given me clothes and shoes!

“Sigh...”

What use is fairness here? The important thing now is to concentrate on clearing this exam.

As if the forest was wrapped around a mountain, there are slopes. In order to check out my surroundings, I headed to higher ground.

In 5 minutes I arrive at a small shallow cliff and look below me.

“WHAT IS THIS?!”

I am stupefied. The forest is so massive, I can't see the end.

“Board retrieval!”

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 1

Karma: 0

Mission: Eliminate the red ape

Time limit: 24 minutes 43 seconds

The first mission limit time was 30 minutes and now I only have 24 minutes left. I thought I could just search through the forest and find the red ape but now I realize that's not going to happen.

This forest is ridiculously large. I'm supposed to search through all of this in 30 minutes? Without knowing what a red ape is?

“It's impossible! This mission was impossible from the beginning!”

Red ape. It could be an animal or it could be a plant. It could even be a person or a monster I've never seen before. The name of that bird flying over there could be red ape too. I know nothing.

The bbundegi bastard had just carelessly thrown me into this arena. And to top it all off, just 30 minutes? Are these people crazy? I am filled with rage.

Are they toying with a man whose only hope is just to live? Are they mocking me?

Then all of a sudden I recall the baby angel's voice.

"You must figure that out on your own."

That's what he told me when I asked him what the red ape is without any other clues.

He was of the mind that I would figure out what the red ape is in this forest full of animals and plants.

'Ok. Lets calm down and think about this'

I organized my thoughts.

Firstly: The time limit is just 30 minutes.

Secondly: He didn't tell me what the red ape is.

Thirdly: They wouldn't give me a mission that is impossible.

Knowing these three things, I reorganized my thoughts.

Is there a way for me to figure out what a red ape is?

There is!

A certain thought brushes across my mind. A way to find out what the red ape is. A way to find out in less than the 30 minutes time limit.

Have the red ape attack me!

If I get attacked, even though I don't know what it is, I'll what it is regardless of what it ends up being.

This explains why the exam time is only 30 minutes. If the red ape was close from the beginning, there was no need for them to give me more time.

"This is it.'

I am filled with reassurance as if I've solved a math problem.

Although it seems dire, now that I think back, the hints were enough.

Alright. Let's think this through one more time.

First: The red ape was close from the beginning.

Secondly: The plan of attack is to have the red ape attack me.

Thirdly: I've wandered for about 5 minutes and haven't discovered the red ape.

The answer is 1. The red ape has found me and is tracking behind me waiting for an opportunity to attack.

'If he's been tracking me from behind there is no way I would have noticed it. Even now he's hiding somewhere looking at me.'

Chills.

Now that that thought has crossed my mind, my hair stands up in fear.

Right now that thing is looking at me, waiting to attack. In order to kill me.

'In that case...'

At the end of my brainstorming, I lean my back against a nearby tree and collapsed to the ground.

"Ahh I'm so fucking tired I could die."

I chatter on by myself so that it can hear me.

I do this in case the thing can understand human speech. Or it could even be a person. I close my eyes and pretend to sleep.

As I do this, my right hand grasps at the earth and grabs a decent sized rock

'Ok. This is the chance I've been waiting for. Come on. Attack me'

Lion, tiger, leopard. It won't be a beast that I can't handle.

That would be too simple. If it was a beast like that, why would it hesitate? It would've attacked me sooner and eaten me.

There's only one reason why it hasn't appeared and has carefully been tracking me this far. It's either because its strength is similar to mine, or weaker.

It has to be something that I could possibly win against.

'Hurry and attack me. I don't know what you are but I wanna see what you look like'

Thinking these things, I pretend to sleep for another 3 minutes. But on the inside, my ears are alert and listening for any sounds. And then, there it is.

Crunch (Sound of stepping on leaves.)

I hear a bush shaking.

'It's come!'

The anticipation rises in my throat.

Crunch. Crunch.

I hear more bush sounds. It seems a bit unnatural.

I laugh to myself.

Brazen bastard.

It's making sounds on purpose. It's checking to see if I'm asleep.

I don't move. I keep snoring and breathing as if I'm asleep.

Soft and tender footsteps are beginning to be delicately heard.

It's careful and swift, but unable to erase the sound of its footsteps completely.

Step step.

It keeps coming closer.

It seems positive now that I am asleep.

I feel like my right hand still holding onto the rock is going to start cramping soon. I so badly want to stand up right now, open my eyes, and throw the rock.

'Not yet.'

Be patient.

The sound of the footsteps has come very close. I feel like my chest will explode.

'NOW!'

I quickly get up and throw the rock.

BAM!

The flying rock lands on its forehead and blood begins to flow.

"Ggirook!"

It lets out a weird, mysterious scream. The bastard holds onto its bleeding forehead and falters in place.

It was the golden chance to take it to the ground, but I was so surprised that my body had frozen in place. It was because of the identity of the red ape.

Chapter 5

Clear (Part 1)

It had one head, a pair of arms, and a pair of legs. It has eyes, a nose, a mouth, ears, and walks upright. But with a bent waist, interestingly long arms, and a body completely covered in red hair.

“It’s... an anthropoid?”

Indeed. The identity of the red ape is an anthropoid. Kind of like a man and monkey mixed half and half. In appearance, it was closer to a monkey, but the expression of surprise and pain on its face was similar to a human.

‘I was supposed to eliminate this?’

I can’t even capture a chicken. A plain animal would have been better. This is analogous to a human.

“Kirook! Ggiroorook!”

The bastard’s thinking seems to be different than mine. He looks at me with thoughts intent on killing me. At the end of his right hand I can see he is holding on to a hatchet with a sharp rock tied to the tip.

‘Isn’t that a hand weapon?’

Damn it. Seems he has the ability to craft a weapon.

‘If I get hit by that, I’ll meet my end’

Shit. I hesitated for no reason.

When I had succeeded in my attack, I should’ve gone in and taken that first!

“Ggiroorook!”

It shouts loudly and the red ape threatens me.

Without even thinking, I am alarmed and take a step back. That was clearly a mistake.

As I took a step back, the bastard grew confident. He began to shorten the distance. Thankfully, the bastard's size is only about 150 cm tall (almost 5 feet tall.) His arms and legs are thin and don't look incredibly strong.

'I should get a weapon... '

At this point, while I'm looking at the ground, I'm looking for a rock to throw.

"Kirook!"

As if he had been waiting for me to turn away, he attacks.

"Huk!"

Without knowing that I was doing it, I guarded myself with my left arm.

The stone headed hatchet he was holding pierced my elbow.

BAM

"ACKKKK!"

A scream automatically escapes from my lips.

It hurt like the muscles in my left arm were being ripped. The tears flow.

"YOU FUCKER!"

In my rage, not looking left or right, I attack.

I quickly grab his right wrist which is holding the stone headed hatchet. I grab it tightly and twist it around and he drops the hatchet screaming.

'I did it!'

I am actually stronger. As long as he doesn't have a weapon, my chances of winning

are much greater.

...

Book!

(TN: it's a noise, not... well... a book.)

“ACK!”

The hatchet wasn’t his only weapon. I felt it through my left cheek that the bastard’s nails are also a sharp weapon.

Even so, only because I reflexively turned my head did I just get scratched like this. I almost lost an eye. But there’s no time to catch my breath.

In addition to his nails being his weapons, so are his front teeth. As if imprinting his teeth, the red ape bites down hard on my left shoulder.

“Kwajig.”

(TN: It's supposed to be a biting down sound.)

“KAAK! SHIT! LET GO!”

I let out a scream and, in an effort to throw him off. I shake my body and throw my fists around.

The bastard clings and hangs off of me and thrusts his teeth deeper.

The bastard’s front teeth are long and sharp. If he evolved, he would probably turn into a vampire.

I’m flailing around in my pain and fall into a panic.

Because he was small, I assumed less of him, but now that I look at it, this fight is not in my favor.

In comparison to the red ape, which has probably experienced many fights like this, I’m just a normal guy that has never fought once in my entire life.

The blood keeps flowing from my scratched cheek and bitten shoulder.

“I’m gonna die like this!”

The fear sets into me and I urgently search my surroundings.

All the vines hanging between the branches catch my eye and I think ‘this is it.’

Having discovered my vein of hope, I start walking in that direction.

The bastard is still hanging off of my body; still engrossed in biting my shoulder.

“Gulp gulp.”

As I see his throat swallow, I get shivers down my spine

Disgusting thing!

This bastard is all caught up in sucking my blood out.

I grab him with my left arm and with my right, untangle some of the vines.

He finally realizes that something weird is going on and comes to his senses. But it’s already too late.

I swiftly wrap his neck in vines.

“Kirook?!”

The red ape stubbornly resists.

I tug on the vine in my right hand as hard as I can.

The vine tightens around the bastard’s neck super tight.

“Kirook...!”

“Die you bastard!”

I almost died and so, like a crazy person, I tug on the vine and choke the bastard’s neck.

The red ape goes pale and white.

His feisty flailing dies down.

I wonder how much time has passed.

His eyes flip over and his mouth starts foaming. It is only now, after the stress passed, that I realize what I have done.

"Ack!"

I let go of the vine and take a step back.

Koong! (Thud sound)

The red ape's body falls to the ground and flips around.

I gasp for breath and stare at the corpse.

'Did I just do this?'

The animal that was so fiercely alive with movement has become an eerie corpse. It has a pained expression on its face.

I made this.

A safe and average life, although lame, but a peaceful life, was the life that I had lived.

And to think that even inside of me, such violence existed; I could not believe it.

'Damn.'

To shake off the nasty feeling, I call upon my board.

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 3

Karma: +500

Mission: Eliminate the red ape

Time Limit: -

The changes on the board were telling me that I have cleared my mission.

And then...

BAM

Right in front of me appeared a familiar door.

It's the mission door.

CREEEK~~

I open the door and step inside.

I am now tired, I want to rest.

Bboo-bboo! (*TN: sound of a horn*)

“Congratulations! Wow! You’ve achieved a great score!”

The baby angel flaps about like a little fruit fly, obnoxiously blowing into a tiny horn that he got from god knows where.

Congratulations?

Do you think I’m in the mood right now to deal with your jokes?

“SHUT UP!”

I scream in a loud voice.

It was only then that the baby angel parts the horn from his lips and stares straight at me.

“Oh. Are you upset?”

'Damn.'

I dug deep inside to control the boiling rage inside of me.

I don't know if the baby angel knows of these feelings of mine but he gently pats me on my shoulders.

"You must feel uncomfortable because you've killed a beast that resembled a human. Well. What are you gonna do. You just have to get used to it."

"I'm supposed to become used to this shitty feeling? Do I look like that kind of person to you?"

"Yes, you do look like that kind of person."

At the angel's answer, I become a chick eating honey.

(*TN: An idiom meaning that he just stops responding. Like a chick that makes noise but stops when you give it honey to eat.*)

The baby angel spoke.

"I'm sure you caught on that the red ape was a hybrid race.

"...of course."

I'm sure that it was tracking me and cautiously waiting to attack all as a method of hunting. And that disgusting image of it sucking the blood out of my shoulder...

And the crazy gaze in that bastard's eyes showing it wanted to eat me.

"If you hadn't' killed it, examinee Hyun-Ho Kim would have met a dreadful end. Just like the rules of nature, it was a fair fight. Did anyone ever criticize a predator for hunting its prey? Did anyone every say it's wrong to go up against a predator?"

"I know too. It's not like I'm feeling guilt or anything!"

I say it shaking.

"It's just that it's scary knowing that such violence exists inside of me."

“While you are completing the arena’s exams, you cannot be protected with laws. Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim must accept violence as a means for survival.”

“...”

“Hey... try being a little happier than that. You got 3 class and 500 karma on your exam. Do you know how great these scores are?”

“Great score my ass. After I’ve become this bloody mess... huh?”

I stopped mid-sentence in surprise. It was as if all the injuries had been washed off my body.

The elbow that had been axed. The bitten shoulder. Both were both clean.

“Once you pass through the door, all injuries and diseases become completely healed.”

“Oh that’s very convenient.”

“Of course. Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s heart diseases also disappeared when you passed through the door.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Now you don’t have to worry about dying from heart disease. Happy?”

“I’m so frickin’ happy about it. Now, as long as I don’t get fucked over completing these exams, I don’t have to worry about dying. Wow. So happy. I feel like I could live a thousand, ten thousand years.”

“Oh there you go again. Stop with your sarcasm and listen for a minute. I say again, but examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s first exam scores were ridiculously good.”

“What in particular did I do so well? I barely escaped with my life. “

“The only thing with the red ape is that you weren’t used to violence. You can get special training and learn to be more disciplined. The reason you got a high score was because of your decision making.”

“Decision making?”

"Yes. Using all of the given hints, it took you less than 6 minutes to realize the red ape was hiding and waiting for you. Usually, people can't do what examinee Hyun-Ho Kim did."

Now that I hear it this way, I suddenly feel awesome.

"According to you, if I'm such an awesome bastard, how come I keep failing the government exam?"

"Examinee Hyun-ho Kim's decision making skills only kick in when you're in danger. Duh"

The baby angel continues to speak.

"You haven't shaped up because you haven't starved. You probably would've passed the exam had you been threatened with death when you weren't studying."

"..."

It's fair so I have nothing to say back.

"Check your board."

"Board retrieval."

I retrieve my board.

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 3

Karma: +500

Mission: Rest until your next exam

Time Limit: 11 days

The descriptions have changed again and I have been given 11 days to rest. It's like my death has been put off for another 11 days.

“When you return to the real world, it’ll be 11 AM and you’ll be waking up from your sleep. However, if you chalk this all up to being a dream, things will begam to get very complicated.”

“And the prize? I thought the karma could be traded for a prize.”

“Once you return to the real world and retrieve your board, you will find out how you can claim your prize.”

“I can retrieve my board in the real world too?”

“Yes. Besides, the board is only visible to you anyhow.”

“Got it.”

The baby angel waves his cute little hand at me.

“Alright then. Have a happy break.”

Ddak-

The baby angel flings his finger and yet another door appears.

I open the door and walk through.

Chapter 6

Clear (Part 2)

I wake up and check my smart phone. It is exactly 11. Not a minute's difference.

I look around and my studio basement's familiar atmosphere comes into view.

'I'm alive!'

Perhaps this is because I had narrowly escaped death. How could I be so happy returning to a world that I thought was so tedious and mundane?

'Wait. Was that all a dream?'

The suspicion surges in. perhaps it was all just a very vivid dog* dream.

(TN: *Meaningless.*)

There is one easy way to verify if that was a dream or real.

"Board retrieval"

The board appears.

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 3

Karma: +500

Mission: Rest until the next exam

Time Limit: 11 days

You may receive your karma prize. To receive your karma prize, retrieve your board and say 'karma prize.'

So it wasn't a dream. I was hopeful that it was.

After the 11 days I have been given, I suppose I will be dragged back to the world of the Arena and fight to the death.

The red ape was a weak bastard so somehow, I was able to defeat him. But there is no telling what kind of monster will appear in the second exam.

I have to receive the karma prize, whether that is a good weapon or skill, so that I can become stronger.

"Karma prize."

As I said it, the letters on the board began to wiggle and change.

-Select the prize you wish obtain.

1. Skill – Gain a capability.
2. Item – Weapon, shield, goods, etc.
3. Other – Turn an object from the real world into an item. The object that is turned into an item can be carried in with you to the exam.

Residual karma: 500

"Hmm... skill?"

At my words, the letters on the board change once more.

-Select the category of skill that you wish to choose.

1. Main skill – Basic skills that the examinee can use are needed for the completion of the exam. This is the most important skill in determining the examinee's chances of passing the exam. Only one can be chosen. According to your skill level, the main skills that are available have been chosen.
2. Secondary skill – Aside from the main skill, the secondary skill aids the examinee as another skill and any can be chosen as long as you follow the conditions.

Residual karma: 500.

So it looks like I can only get 1 main skill and multiple secondary skills.

In simple terms, one major and multiple minors.

'So in that case, the most important thing is the main skill.'

I decide to choose my main skill first.

"Main skills."

-There are two main skills that meet examinee's Hyun-Ho Kim's level. Please select your desired main skill.

1. Aura control: You control your aura and surpass the limits of your mortal self.

*Entry – level 1: Ability to control your internal aura (-400).

2. Spirit Summoning: Contract with a spirit and use its strength. Engage with a spirit and use its natural strength.

*Spirits available for selection – Fire, Wind.

*Entry level 1: You may use the above spirit for two hours. Each time you use its powers, the time decreases (-400).

Residual karma: 500

Aura control and spirit summoning... after reading the description, I kind of get an idea of what these skills are.

The aura control is similar to the eastern idea of gathering chi in the dantian. On the other hand, the spirit summoning sounds like I call upon an element and have it fight for me.

'The summoning sounds better'

Let's think about this. With the aura control, I have to gather the aura and do the fighting myself. But with the summons, I can have it fight for me. Simply put, the latter

is the safer method!

Hmm... anyway that (-400) written there probably means it's gonna cost 400 karma. Currently, I have 500 karma. So if I do the summoning entry level 1, I'll be left with 100 karma.

'What should I do with the leftover karma?'

After a brief moment, I speak to the board.

"Show me all the weapons that can be gained with 100 karma."

And once again, the letters on the board change.

The AI on this board is killer.

-Please select the category weapon.

1. Katana
2. Spear
3. Mace/Hammer (Literally says blunt object)
4. Throwing knives (literally says hidden weapon)
5. Bow and arrow
6. Other

Residual karma: 500

Good. I will become a great swordsman!

...that thought about selecting number 1 is definitely not happening.

Are they crazy? Do they think this is some fantasy novel?

Clearly, the long distance weapon is the safe and wise choice. But the long distance weapon number 5 seems difficult to use unless you're a trained expert.

Isn't there anything like a gun? I'm confident in my marksmanship. When I was in the army, I even gained a lot of vacation days by being a good marksman.

"Number 6, other."

I think maybe and I select number 6.

-This category is for other weapons that can be selected with 100 karma. Please select the weapon.

Underneath was a large list of all kinds of weapons. Sling, knuckles, poison dart. All difficult weapons to use. I skim through the list and on the 12th item, my eyes stop.

"It has it!"

Surprisingly, there is a gun.

12. Magic Gun

Place the bullet in the chamber. After placement, cock the weapon, and a powerful magic bullet will shoot out. Usage is easy and simple. (-100)

*Effective distance: 60 meters

*Maximum Range: 150 meters

*Comes with 100 bullets and cartridge

A gun that is worth exactly 100 karma.

A weapon with very clear benefits.

However, it does seem like it would be inconvenient that every time I need to shoot, I have to place a bullet one by one each time.

The distance is short, and because the bullets are like round marbles, it seems like the penetrating power will be weak.

I do like that it says the usage is simple and easy. Also, because it doesn't use gunpowder, it'll be safer and quieter.

"Ok. I'm gonna do this one for the weapon."

The only weapon that I can use is a gun anyway. Now I'm wondering how to use the 500.

Firm in my decision, I say to the board,

"I will purchase the Spirit Summon Level 1 and The Magic Gun."

-You have selected Spirit Summon Level 1. Please select the spirit you wish to summon.

1. The fire spirit: Kasa
2. The wind spirit: Sylph

In shooting, there is nothing as important as wind. I'm thinking that the wind spirit and a gun will be a good combination.

Paaat!

Suddenly, a light flows out from the board. It's so bright that I have to cover my face with my hands.

A short while later, the light disappears and the letters on the board have changed.

-You have acquired Main Skill Entry Level 1. You can review all the skills that you have acquired by saying "skill review."

-You have acquired the magic gun. If you say "weapon" it will retrieve your weapon. If you say "weapon cancel" your weapon will disappear.

-You have acquired the bullet cartridge. If you say "equip," your tool will be retrieved. If you say "tool cancel" your tool will disappear.

-Residual karma: 0

Let's see.

Skill review, weapon, weapon cancel, equip, tool cancel.....

I carefully read the orders on the board and decide to give them a try, one by one.

“Skill review.”

As I say it, new words immediately appear on the board.

-Spirit Summon (Main Skill): You are retrieving the low level wind spirit, Sylph. If you say “Sylph” it will be retrieved.

*Entry level 1: Retrieval period 2 hours

When you use Sylph’s power, the time limit remaining is reduced.

(TN: Literally says: ‘Use Sylph’s power and it will use time.’ So what I assume it means is that the more power Sylph uses, the less time it can be summoned.)

“Sylph.”

A stream of wind swooshes in and wraps around my face once before passing by.

A tiny whirlwind blows in and creates an opaque shape. The wind spirit, Sylph, has appeared.

Sylph’s appearance is...

-Meow

“A cat?”

I’m completely surprised.

A tiny kitten, in its opaque appearance, was meowing and gave me a friendly look.

It delicately jumped onto my shoulder and rubs its face on my cheek.

Oh, it’s extremely cute.

“Nice to meet you”

-Meow

It seems Sylph is also pleased to meet me.

As I pet it, it stars to purr and enjoy itself.

Alright. Now that I've retrieved the spirit, let's try the item.

"Weapon, equip."

I say the two orders back to back.

PAAT! PAAT!

In my right hand was the magic gun and my hip was wrapped with a leather bandolier* with the bullet cartridge attached to it.

(TN: An ammo belt like you would see in an old west cowboy movie)

Interesting. That it automatically buckles onto me just with spoken words.

I open the bullet cartridge and tiny lead marbles are densely packed inside. These must be the lead bullets.

The magic gun is about a meter in length and made of wood. It's light so it should be easy to carry around.

"Weapon cancel. Tool cancel."

The magic gun and the bullet belt disappear.

And so I've used all my 500 karma and received my prizes.

I'll find out if these were good choices at the next exam.

Chapter 7

Reward

I became determined to surpass my life of being an eternal student.*

(TN: Literally says a person studying for the civil exam.)

The break period is merely 11 days. I don't know how much more life I have left. Therefore, I can't waste the precious time I have left in this one room basement. I called the landlady and told her I will be emptying my space immediately. We decided that I would get the security deposit back once she gets a new tenant.

I called the convenience store manager where I had been part-timing. I lied, saying that I was hit by a motorcycle and fractured my leg. The manager argued and begged, but what is he going to do. I'm saying I broke it.

After quitting work, lastly, I give my mom a call. The store opens at 2 pm, so she's probably still at home?

Of course, mom picks up the phone as soon as it starts to ring.

"Oh. Son. You never call me first."

It had only just been a day, but mom's voice was so warm and inviting.

Without being aware, my lips made a smile.

"Mom, I called because I missed you."

"Ho. Son, have you been day drinking?"

"No."

"I see. You need cash, huh?"

"Last week was my paycheck day."*

(TN: He was being sarcastic here.)

"But you're in the stage where your paycheck just briefly touches your bank account."

"This is true. But I still have some wiggle room."

"Then why did you call? Oh. Is it because of the civil exam? Because you don't think you'll get it this time and you want to ask for another chance until next year?"

"...Mom. What do you take me for?"

"I take you for a rock headed son."

(TN: Meaning you have a rock in your head instead of a brain.)

"Anyway. I'm going to return home"

"What?"

Mom asked me with surprise in her voice.

I answered.

"I'm going to quit the civil exam and will be returning immediately tomorrow. Whether I fry chicken or stir it, I'm going to do what you tell me to do."

"Son, did something happen?"

Yeah. I died once.

I smiled and replied back.

"Just... I felt like my life is too precious to be spent in a wishy washy manner. And I want to hyodo* you too."

(TN: Kind of like to take care of your parents as a way to pay them back for raising you.)

"Really?"

“What. Why?”

“Oh my goodness son! I’m so moved I’m about to cry. My goodness!”

“Yuppp. Take it all in. Your son is *this* filial.”

And through the smart phone, I could hear the conversation.

“Hey Hyun-ji, your oppa* has finally given up and is going to come home!”

(TN: What a younger sister calls an older brother.)

“Really? Jeez, that’s a relief. I was getting worried about him living like that. Being over 30 and all.”

‘These jerks...’

I quench my anger and speak.

“Anyway, I’m coming back tomorrow so clean out my room.”

“Ok of course of course. Mom will make you some delicio...”

“Not fried chicken. I want bossam.”*

(TN: Kimchi filling with boiled pork belly that is wrapped in salted cabbage leaves.)

“Ok. I’ll make you some bossam then.”

‘Perhaps it was because mom was so excited to have me back home, her voice was giddy.

After the phone call, I call the mover’s center and got a moving truck.

Organizing my life only took 30 minutes.

‘I will no longer waste even one minute or one second.’

I firmly promise myself this.



The place my family lives in is an apartment located in the Seobuk province in the city of Cheonan.

Right next to it was the Cheonan bus terminal, so transportation was simple, and being 1800 sq ft with 4 rooms, there was plenty of space for mom and us 3 siblings.

Riding in the mover's car, I arrived home. With the driver's help, I unloaded the car. Because I don't have many things, it didn't take very long.

"Thank you very much. On the way back, please have a meal on me."

"Oh. Thank you."

I gave him a \$10 bill and he departed with his car with a smile.

(TN: \$10 is more than enough for a meal in Korea. A good sized bowl of noodles at a food stall is around \$6.)

I look around at my empty hallway of the house. After spending years cooped up in a basement studio, seeing this wide hallway is like a breath of fresh air.

"Wow. I should've come home sooner."

And I think to myself.

'Wow, I spent so much time wasted in that tiny dungeon.'

If I had known I was going to die of heart disease at 29, I wouldn't have spent my life that way.

Organizing my things took less time than I thought.

'I don't want to just sit here and waste my time.'

The time that has been given to me is 11 days. Every minute, every second, is precious.

I walk into the kitchen I see that in the sink, dishes have been stacked mountains high. Looking at the site, I smile to myself.

“I knew this is what would happen.”

Mom and my older sister were busy working, and so the household chores fell to my younger sister, Hyun-ji. But Hyun-ji is currently a college senior preparing for a job. On top of it, she isn’t super diligent and the house was a mess.

‘Now that I’m unemployed, I should do it.’

I roll up my sleeves and did the dishes. After finishing quickly, I take out the vacuum cleaner.

‘Hold on. Don’t I have a spirit I can summon?’

“Sylph”

-Meow.

Sylph appears and delicately climbs onto my head. I die from cuteness when it shifts its tail back and forth, tap tapping on my head.

“Sylph, can you use your wind power and gather all the dust in the house into one spot?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

And then, a single gust of wind blows in and out through my house.

Swish.

Under the sofa, behind the TV, under the bed, on top of all the closets. The wind swept through every nook and cranny and stopped at my feet.

“Yuck. Look at all this dust.”

A dust bunny nearly the size of my head sat in front of me. It was the result of collecting all the dust in the entire house.

As if someone might say it’s not a household with 3 women, the amount of hair was

ridiculous. Ick... gross.

-Meow.

Sylph swishes her tail back and forth from atop the dust bunny. She stares up at me with glistening eyes as if to ask if she did a good job.

"Thanks Sylph. You did a really good job."

-Meow.

Sylph rubs her face against my cheek. Aww man. I can totally see why people raise cats.

Thanks to Sylph's assistance, the house cleaning ended really quickly. Now what should I do?

'Maybe I should exercise in preparation for the 2nd exam?'

Of course, there won't really be a big difference from 11 days of exercising, but it's better than not doing it at all.

There's actually a hiking trail on Taejo Mountain and it should be some good exercise. The 1st exam location was a forest in a mountain. I never know if there will be more occasions for fighting in forests or mountains. The time given to me is but 11 days. However, if I hike every day, I'll become familiar with the environment and my stamina might improve a little.

I put on my sweats and tennis shoes and leave the house. Having arrived at the entrance to Taejo Mountain, I ambitiously choose the longest trail, which takes 1 hour and 50 minutes. I am determined to finish this trail once a day.

Not long after starting the trail, I become short of breath and my footsteps become heavy.

'Should I have picked an easier trail for the first time?'

After a moment of a weakness, I lift up my head and promise myself.

'No whining. This is matter of life. Even if it's hard, I have to go through with it.'

It was an interesting turn of events. After a life full of no ambition and goals, for the first time, there was a clear goal.

Exam, arena, live!

It was a surprising dynamic.

As I steadfastly climbed the Taejo Mountain trail, my breath escapes me and I start panting like the wind, so much so that passing elderly hikers stare at me. Even then, I don't stop and continue to trek forward.

Even while feeling dizzy and feeling like I might vomit, I stubbornly continue to step forward. I am still in my lively 20s. If I can't complete this trail without resting, then I fail at being a man.

'No one will save me. I have to flail about on my own.'

Tired and exhausted, I finally get to the summit of the mountain and I can see the whole expanse of the city of Cheonan. My soul feels lifted and the cold wind refreshingly cools my sweat. My heart and body is tired, but perhaps because of it, I feel even more refreshed. It is because up to now, I have never given my all towards anything before.

'Pitiful bastard.'

I come to regret my past life. I hate myself for having lived a life without concentrating enough to climb one mounting.

"I'll forgive you this once, but from now on, let's not live like that Kim Hyun-ho."

After the firm promise to myself, I return down the path I came and head home.

Chapter 8

Family (Part 1)

After returning from my hike, I see that my younger sister, Hyun-ji, is home. It seems she has just returned from school.

“Oh my gosh! Oppa, you’ve lost a lot of weight.”

“It’s from all the struggles from studying.”

“Haha that’s funny. It’s probably because of eating only cup ramen and triangle rice from the convenience store you worked at.”

“Oh... so you know.”

“Anyway, did you do all the cleaning and the dishes?”

“Indeed.”

“Whoa. Really?”

“I know you’re really busy preparing for the workforce right now. I temporarily have nothing to do, so all this stuff I’ll do for you.”

At my words, Hyun-ji’s eyes become wide. With an uneasy and anxious expression she says.

“Who are you?”

“I’m your oppa”

“Lies. My oppa is not this kind.”

“I think you need to get hit.”

As I am about to flick her forehead, she squeals and runs away and after going back

and forth, Hyun-ji says this.

“Don’t you need to eat dinner? Mom and unni* says they’re going to be late.”

(TN: Unni is what a younger sister calls her older sister. Pronounced uhn-nee.)

“Oh really? You want to order something?”

“What do you mean order? Mom made bossam already? I’ll set the table.”

This time I stare at her with eyes full of suspicion.

“Who are you? My younger sister is not so domesticated as to set the table.”

Hyun-ji giggles and laughs.

And then she says.

“I have my integrity. You said you did all the dishes and cleaned the house. The least I can do is set up the table and dinner for you.”

“Really? Sounds about right. It’s not like just because you’re a senior, you’re going to start studying all of a sudden when you didn’t study before...”

“Hey. Excuse me. But I am working hard at preparing for the workforce right now, ok?”

“I heard that mom caught you last time you went to play at the club.”

At my criticism, Hyun-ji pouts her lips.

“It was just to uplift my mood. I didn’t go meet guys and play with them. I just went with a friend and danced.”

“Tsk tsk. It’s really a problem that you like to play so much.”

“Oh shut up. Go and wash up while I set up the table. You daebak* smell like sweat.”

(TN: Something similar to mean extreme, but more like fricking in this case. It can also mean amazing, crazy, etc.)

“Yes yes.”

While she set the table, I took a shower and changed my clothes.

Bossam, kimchi, brown rice, and an assortment of side dishes were deliciously set up before me. I was surprised because there was even some seaweed soup*. It's not even anyone's birthday. But at the news of my return, it seems mom was extremely excited.

(TN: Seaweed soup is usually only made on birthdays.)

“Hurry up and eat, its cooling down.”

“Ok.”

In good spirits we sat down at the table, watching TV while eating our dinner.

“Time really must have passed by.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, in the old days, you and I used to fight to the point where the house might flip over.”

“Yeah that’s true. Actually, up until yesterday, at the news that you might be returning home, I was full of thoughts of pushing my chores onto you. But because you did all the dishes and the cleaning, it took a poke at my integrity too.”

“You bitch. You must have been super excited at the thought of giving me all your chores.”

“Haha. Well, since you said you’ll be doing it all for me, I’ll do the cooking and laundry then.”

“Alright, sounds good. It’s not like there’s only a few women’s underwear so it would’ve been weird for me to do the laundry anyway.”

“Ha. Uncomfortable with a couple lady’s underwear? Oppa, are you still a virgin?”

This bitch?

"Mom and noona's* underwear is no problem but I feel like your underwear would be frivolous. So as an oppa, it frightens me a bit"

(TN: What a younger brother calls an older sister.)

"What? What do you take me for!"

"A club addict."

"Humph. Better than being unemployed."

"Haha. Don't you graduate soon?"

"Well... so?"

"Just saying. I can't wait till next year."

"Fine. Go on railing me. But I'm going to get employed."

"Yeah well, when I graduated I thought it would all go according to plan too..."

"Oh don't look at me with that expression. I'll never become unemployed like you."

"Hey hey, who do you keep calling unemployed?"

"Well then what are you?"

"The morning* star of the fried chicken business."

(TN: Could possibly also mean the rising star.)

Hyun-ji rolls around laughing.

Time really passes by. To think that a day like this would come where I would talk about employment and life hopes with a sister six years my junior.

"Lately, unni has been saying she wants to get married and has been asking mom to find some suitors.*

(TN: It isn't uncommon in Korea to ask your mom to ask her friends if they know about

any available guys.)

“Really? Then again, she’s already 33 so it’s about time.”

“Isn’t it so weird? I mean she’s not lacking in anything, so why doesn’t she have a man? She’s pretty and her body is nice and she’s a lawyer. If it were me, I would have 100 guys lined up.”

“Is noona you?”

“Still, it’s weird. Seeing as how she wants to get married, she isn’t a lone wolf, and she isn’t a lesbian.”

“Well noona is a bit much. Her words are few, but her personality is really strong and her cold stare is enough to deter the average guy.”

Hyun-ji laughs at it all.

“Yeah. Unni’s expressions are a bit scary. I’m up in your face to you, but I can’t dare say a thing to unni. Even when I got caught playing at the club, I was more scared of her finding out and yelling at me.”

“Yeah well, don’t ever come crawling to me.”

“Yeah right.”

I let out a deep sigh.

“Meh. Who am I to be talking about anybody else. At least noona makes good money and is pretty popular. As for all the dating I’ve ever done was when I entered college. I met eyes with a girl at orientation and we dated for half a year, and that’s all. After that, father passed away and the household became chaotic. I was going to school, working two part time jobs, and then took the army exam...”

I gather my thoughts and realized that I really might finish my life without ever feeling love. I’m seriously a pitiful guy. As I keep letting out my deep sighs, Hyun-ji stares at me with eyes full of sympathy.

“Should I introduce you to a friend of mine?”

Ahh temptation.

The thought of meeting a girl right before I die enters my mind. However, I shake my head.

“No thanks.”

Maybe I’ll just keep thinking about dying. The important thing is my will.

(TN: He’s talking about his will to survive, not his will for after death.)

It’s my strong determination to clear all the exams and live.

With my firm decision, I don’t want to use my precious 11 days just meeting a girl.

“Aww. My poor brother. Do the chicken business with mom and give it some time. When you reach your 30s, there will be lots of ladies like our sister, at a precarious age, throwing themselves at you.”

“Throwing?”

I laugh together with Hyun-ji. Hyun-ji is rather exuberant and talkative and the time flew by.

After our meal, I say.

“I’ll clear the table, you go in and study.”

“Oh oppa. You’re suddenly being too good to me and it’s weird.”

“Hey. You are not adjusting well to this Olabuhni’s* kindness.

(TN: It’s how you say oppa from when there were still kings and queens. This kind of Korean was used maybe around ~500 years ago. Think Shakespearean language, but Korean.)

“Hee Hee. Thank you. I’ll be sure to pick a pretty and nice girl from my friends and introduce you.”

“Guhlyuh.”*

(TN: Shakespearean Korean again. It means something like “then let it be so.”)

I too hope that such a day can come.

Hyun-ji goes inside to study. I clear the table and after I do the dishes really quickly, I start to exercise. This time, muscle exercise. After 50 pushups, my arms begin to shake. And thanks to the hike, my legs are shaking too. I’m just a mess.

But I’m in this state after just one hike. I am exasperated with myself. Will I be able to keep this up every day for 11 days?

‘Even so, I have to keep going.’

And even so, the hike today and the pushups were but simple exercise. I also have to train to use the magic gun and spirit summons during fights.

‘Alright then. I’m tired now so I’ll rest a bit. And I’ll go out at dawn when no one is around to start training.’

It’s not like I can train to use a gun and summon a spirit in front of other people where they can see.

I don’t want to be YouTube star yet. I lie down on the sofa and close my eyes.

Chapter 9

Family (Part 2)

“Son!”

It’s a mature voice mixed with some cuteness.

When I open my eyes, mom and noona have come home. It seems noona had picked up mom on her way home.

“Mom, you’re home?”

“Yup. I heard my son came home so I closed the store early.”

I look at my watch and it’s midnight. The fried chicken business that mom runs doesn’t sell alcohol like a bar, so there’s no reason for it to be open so late.

I blatantly stare at my sister.

Kim Hyun-ju. Age 33. Occupation: Dispute* specialist lawyer currently working at a large law firm.

(TN: It could mean divorce but I’m not sure.)

Her slender face with her glasses resting on her cheek is on the pretty side, but her cold eyes and lack of expression make her scary.

Anyhow, noona is holding on to a bottle of wine.

“What’s with the wine?”

“In commemoration of you no longer wasting your life.”

“...”

That... that... cruel woman. This is why she has no man.

“Go get the beer from the veranda.”

“Ok.”

Inside the kimchi fridge, in the veranda, there are stacks of beer.

Noona likes the drink.

Wine and beer and the left over fried chicken that mom brought created a giant alcoholic spread.

Hyun-ji, who had been studying in her room, even slithered out and sat with us. Because when it comes to alcohol, this kid's eyes come around too.* In her drunken state, mom taps me on my back and encourages me.

(TN: Meaning Hyun-ji goes crazy for alcohol as well.)

“Son! Son’s brain was just never meant for studying.”

It’s not encouraging at all.

“It’s an entrance exam and Hyun-ju did it in a year, but what about my son? It’s not like it was a law entrance exam, it was only a civil exam.”

“I’m sorry for wasting my life and money.”

“More importantly, get married. You and Hyun-ju both. What I’m saying is, someone give me a grandchild!”

At the mention of marriage, the rate of noona’s drinking quickly increased. Three or four cans in, she starts asking if there are any decent guys around.

In addition, Hyun-ji, who has also been slamming down beer, starts whining, asking if she can just play around and not get a job. She’s saying she’ll get a job after play for a couple years.

She would think up crap like this...

At a glance, it seems like I’ll be in charge of cleaning up, but all I can do is smile. Why did I not know? That just being with family could bring so much happiness.

I feel like perhaps the biggest prize to passing the first exam is this moment right now.



The next morning.

The inside of the house was chaos. Empty beer cans and fried chicken bones were everywhere and my family members were struggling and in a daze.

High tolerance Hyun-ji sobered up first and goes to shake noona.

“Unni, you have to go to work! Wake up!”

“Ughhhh I don’t want to go to work today.”

In an expression of annoyance, she turned her back on her.

“But then you’ll get fired!”

“Then let them fire me.”

“No! If you have no man and you have no job, you’re a total loser!”

At Hyun-ji’s stabbing remark, noona shows a reaction.

After getting up with some difficulty, Hyun-ji drags noona to the bathroom. It’s a tear wrenching scene.

I have just awoken and I grab my head that feels like it’s about to split and let out a sigh.

‘Man. I just ended up sleeping that first night.’

Ah damn. The spirit summoning and shooting practice was the most important thing and I just forgot about it. Alcohol is indeed the enemy.

Noona dragged her tired body to work and Hyun-ji said she has a morning lecture and went off to class. And when the time comes, mom too will wake up and go to work.

I decide that I have to do the shooting and spirit practice today. Not right now, but later

in the morning.

First of all, like I did yesterday, I have to hike and do pushups.

And then, all of a sudden, perhaps because I went too far, my whole body was aching. With the hangover, I wasn't in the best condition, but I washed up quickly and headed out.

Like a dog on blessings day, I went up the mountain panting the whole way.*

(TN: St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and ecology. October 4th is the day where there is a feast to bless your pets. It seems many churches will give a verbal blessing and use holy water on the pets to bless them.)

And with trembling arms, I barely succeeded in 50 pushups. Oh I am so lame. At least when I was in the army, my physical condition was decent.

I come home and wash up, eat lunch, and it's already 2 pm. I fill the tub with hot water and take a bath. On somewhat relaxed limbs, I put on a muscle pain relief salve.* I laid out my blankets in preparation for a nap. A nap when 1 minute, 1 second is so precious?

(TN: Something similar to tiger balm.)

It's because the spirit summoning and shooting practice have to be done at dawn, when there are no people.

In order to best use my time efficiently, I change the schedule and decided to sleep in the afternoon.

After a brief sleep, it's already 8 pm.

“Hee hee. Unemployed oppa, you up?”

Hyun-ji, who had returned from school, was teasing my disheveled waking face.

Now that I think of it, in her eyes, I must have seemed like nothing more than an unemployed oppa and therefore took a nap.

“It’s because I worked out so hard earlier.”

"Worked out?"

"A hike. I'm going to do it every day."

"Bleckk. An early morning hike? Oppa's is totally acting like an unemployed person."

"My dear younger sister, how is it that every time I talk to you it makes me angry. You want to get hit by oppa?"

"Hahahaha. Anyway. Why are you exercising all of a sudden? You're already so skinny it can't be for a diet."

"To survive in the intense fried chicken work, I have to work on my fitness first."

At my words, Hyun-ji bursts out in laughter.

We make a simple dinner out of the seaweed soup and side dishes from yesterday. We clear the table, do the dishes, and get the cleaning done. And even then, there are many hours left until midnight, so I take out the laptop.

What I search for on the web is survival skills for how to survive in a forest or mountain wilderness. I research gun shooting positions and shootout strategies. I took notes on any useful information and studied.

'You idiot, you should've studied this hard to begin with.'

What the baby angel with the dangling bbundegi said was right. If I had studied like life or death as on the line before, I would have passed the civil exam. A life where every time I look at my life I'm full of regret is just proof that I was living wrong.

Well. I've already done a lot of regretting. Let's stop now.

And so the time passed until midnight.

"There's probably no one on the mountain on this hour?"

I changed my clothes and head out.

The training location will be where I do my every day hikes, Taejo Mountain. There will be no people at night and I took notice of a field during the day.



It's a little embarrassing to say as an adult nearing 30, but it's very unsettling to be walking on the street at night all alone.

There are people that set up tents and camp at the Mount Taejo Park, but the mountain pass I'm headed to is devoid of people.

'Ahh. I'm afraid a ghost might pop out.'

You're probably wondering, a 30 year old man and a ghost? I didn't used to believe in these things either, but after dying once, my thoughts have changed. Baby angels exist, so why not a ghost.

'Ah. What about Sylph?'

I immediately call for Sylph.

-Meow.

The summoned Sylph rubs herself against my face is being cute. Looking at cute Sylph dissipates all my fears.

Hold on. Wasn't Sylph's summon time only 2 hours?

"Skill Review."

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 1 hour 59 minutes.)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

So 2 hours was correct. If I used Sylph's powers, the time limit will decrease faster.

'Because of the time limit, I guess I won't be able to do a lot of spirit summon training.'

It seems I will have to spare the summoning time as much as I can.

I speak to Sylph as I pet her.

"Sylph, I'll call you in a little while. So go away for now?"

-Meow.

Sylph let out a soft reply and, as if a mirage, disappears.

I was once again left all alone on the mountain road in the dead of night.

Damn it. What's there to be scared about? I am guy that, in 10 days, will have to fight to the death.

With that thought in mind, without any more trepidation, I marched on.

It's because there is no probably as serious as an exam with my life on the line. After 10 more minutes of hiking, I find the field I had taken note of earlier.

It was field wrapped in tightly packed trees that almost made a canopy.

'Let's do this.'

First is shooting practice.

"Weapon, equip."

In my right hand was the magic gun and around my waist was the bandolier. The amount of bullets in the belt numbered exactly 100.

The shooting practice should be...

'Huh?'

My eyes widened at the sudden truth.

"This is crazy. Plenty my ass. This isn't enough."

The lead bullets are an expendable item. If I use them during training, replenishing them is impossible.

And then I think, well maybe after shooting practice, I can pick them up and use them again. I can just have Sylph pick up all the shot bullets. But then I think the material of

the bullet is lead. When it reaches its target, it'll receive a strong force and the shape will crumble!

"Board retrieval!"

The board appeared in midair.

"How many bullets are there?"

Lead bullets 100: bullets made with a lead material to be used with a gun (-2)

-Remaining karma: 0

Luckily, it is possible to get 100 bullets at the price of 2 karma. Unfortunately, the karma I have left is 0.

It is the result of carefully not leaving any of my exam winning karma.

...Careful my ass. I hadn't thought about getting more bullets.

"You idiot. Now what are you going to do!"

I collapse into a sitting position onto the floor.

And so shooting practice because a stretch.

And there was no benefit for me having come out in the dead of night for training.

"The 100 bullets I do have need to be used at the 2nd exam.

I do not know how the 2nd exam will be. If it's something like one of the red ape from the first exam, it'll be fine. But it could be crawling with 10 of them. I have to spare as many of my expendable bullets as I can.

Didn't they say that in the Vietnam War that every soldier, to kill one person, used 50,000 bullets?

'No. My gun is not an automatic anyway so it can't just expend them like that.'

Thus, unlike an automatic gun that just sprays, I have to carefully aim and shoot every

single time.

'But if that's the case, I have to increase my marksmanship through training!'

I have to somehow do my shooting training. I can't step into the exam without ever having shot it. I take my smart phone out of my pocket. I open the internet browser and search for bullets. I'm trying to find marble shaped bullets that are the same as my lead ones.

"It's here!"

Out of joy, I shouted without even realizing. On the internet shopping mall, they are selling sling bullets that you use for slingshots made of steel. Round marbles, their sizes come in 7mm, 8mm, 9mm and many more.

Using an app on my phone, I measure the size of my lead bullets. The size of the lead bullets for the magic gun is exactly 10 mm and the shopping mall is currently selling 10 mm slingshot bullets. I immediately order 500.

I desperately wish they will get here soon.

I only have 10 days.

I am somewhat relieved to have solved the shooting problem bullets problem.

Chapter 10

Training

'Well I'm already here so I might as well try shooting like 5 bullets. The lead bullets that I will use for the exam and the steel material slingshot bullets that I just ordered are of different weights. I have to become familiar with the feeling of shooting the lead bullets.

'Let's shoot.'

I take out a single lead bullet and put it into the chamber. And then I aim at a pine tree about 20 meters off.

'I thought it would be uncomfortable, but loading the gun is pretty easy. You just put the bullet in the chamber and that's it. Very simple. The modern era rifles had to hand pack gunpowder and poke it in with a stick and all this stuff. But this uses a magically shot lead bullet and not gunpowder so it was very simple.'

I squat down in the 'sit and shoot' position and put the butt of the gun against my shoulder.

I adjust the two sights, look down the gun, and aim. I stop my breathing and then, shoot.

Toong-

And with the small sound, a heavy recoil was felt on my shoulder.

Pajik! (Tree bark breaking sound)

And the bark on the pine tree that was hit with the lead bullet got blown off.

'The recoil on this is a lot weaker than the K2 I used in the army. I suppose that means the power is a lot weaker too.'

Of course there are advantages to this.

'Because the gun is light and the recoil is small, even without getting into the proper position, shooting should be easier. Even the sound is small. Because it is not a gunpowder gun, it doesn't make a loud noise either'

I get close and examine the pine tree to investigate. The impression of where the tree was hit was dug out.

If it's this much, it should have enough power to kill.

If I aim correctly, it's enough to kill the red ape in one shot.

"Sylph"

-Meow

I speak to the summoned Sylph.

"Pick up the bullet that I just shot."

-Meow

Sylph quickly vanished about into the air and came back with the lead bullet in her mouth and placed it in my palm.

"Ahh of course..."

As predicted, the lead bullet was completely crumpled up. Re-using them was impossible. I definitely have to become a one shot, one kill sniper.

I step a little further away from my target pine tree.

Toong.

This time it didn't land on the pine tree.

"Go pick it up Sylph."

Sylph brings me the lead bullet I shot. This time, luckily, the shape of the lead bullet was fine. Seeing as how there is a lot of dirt on it, it seems it had landed on the ground.

“Thank god. Every single shot is precious.”

“Sylph. Do you perhaps know the distance between here and the pine tree over there?”

-Meow?

Sylph shakes her head.

‘Aww. Sylph doesn’t understand meters.’

I pull out my smart phone and show Sylph the measurement app on my phone.

“Here. This is 1 centimeter and 100 centimeters is 1 meter. Get it now?”

-Meow!

With a confident reply, Sylph marked a number in the ground.

41.

Damn. It’s only 41 meters and I couldn’t hit it. I couldn’t hit that giant pine tree?

‘My aim is not very good.’

Then again, the K2 gun that I used in the army was a modern weapon that had been advanced with science. On the other hand, the magic gun that I have, at first glance, is very old school. The bullets are a round marble shape. So of course the accuracy is iffy.

I have to one shot, one kill, but the accuracy of this gun makes that a problem. The only thing left to trust now is Sylph.

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

“If I shoot the gun, can you use your power to make sure it hits the tree?”

-Meow

Sylph nods her head.

"Alright. Then I'll just kind of shoot and you use your power to make the lead bullet hit the pine tree. Exactly where it had hit before."

-Meow!

"Ok. I'm going to shoot."

I placed a lead bullet into the chamber and I thoughtfully get into position. Without carefully aiming down the sights, I pull on the trigger right away.

Toong!

At the same time as the bullet came out, Sylph flew.

Puk! (Bam)

From the pine tree came another heavy sound that echoed. It hit its mark.

I ran up and checked the pine tree. Surprisingly, the bullet mark had imprinted right in the place where the first bullet had hit.

"We did it!"

About this much and that's really good accuracy. Going forward, if I can use Sylph's help like this, I'll be 100 for 100. The next problem is how much of Sylph's power was used for that shooting.

"Skill Review."

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 1 hour 29 minutes.)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

The remaining summoning time has decreased by a lot so I ask Sylph.

"Sylph, how many minutes has it been since I've summoned you?"

Sylph marks the ground.

17.

That means using Sylph's power reduced the time by 14 minutes! I've used too much of Sylph's power.

'Perhaps this is a given?'

The lead bullet that came out of the gun had flown out with extreme speed and power. It makes sense that using wind to alter the path of the powerfully shot bullet used a lot of power.

And on top of that, the distance is only 41 meters. If the length had been further, and Sylph had only used a small amount of power, the direction would have been greatly changed, however, having to move the lead bullet in a shorter distance means more power had to be used.

'If there are only 1 or 2 creatures to fight, then this will be enough... '

Once shot is 14 minutes. Which just 8 shots, Sylph's summon time will be up.

In a situation with multiple enemies, it isn't that useable of a skill.

Once the summons period is over, I have to wait 10 hours to summon again, and this skill has too large a penalty.

"Is there no other way?"

I sit down and rest and go deep into thought.

The magic gun's accuracy is not very high. How am I to fight when I can't properly hit a large pine tree that is just 41 meters away? Sylph's power is crucial. With no good thoughts coming to mind, I lift up the magic gun.

In my sitting position, I put a lead bullet into the chamber and aim at the pine tree.

-Meow

Sylph sat, stuck right next to me, and casually swept her tail back and forth.

Now that I think of it, a sniper always has a spotter next to them, no?

It was as if I was a sniper and Sylph was my spotter. But I'm sure there isn't a spotter in the world that's as cute as this one.

"Sylph, if I shoot like this, do you think it'll hit the pine tree?"

-Meow

Sylph nods her head.

"Do you think I'll be able to hit the spot from the first bullet?"

This time, she shakes her head back and forth.

"Then?"

Sylph flies in front of me and with her adorable front paw, moves the barrel very slightly left.

"It'll work if I shoot like this?"

-Meow

Sylph nods her head.

'Alright. So should we give it a go?'

In order not to deviate from the aim that Sylph had set, I monitor my heartbeat and concentrate.* Without the slightest movement, I hold my breath, and then I delicately pull the trigger.

(TN: Literally says 'I tame my cardiovascular and concentrate.' But I'm fairly certain he was trying to shoot between his heartbeats so the twitching doesn't affect his aim.)

Toong-Pajik!

It shot the pine tree. As if out of happiness, Sylph was flying in circles around my head.

I run up and check out the pine tree.

"WOW!"

The dip from the first shot was even more dug out.

“This is exactly it!”

A way to use a very small amount of Sylph’s power and still shoot 100 out of 100!

“Sylph. This time, I’m going to close my eyes and shoot. The moment I pull the trigger, you adjust the barrel of the gun.”

-Meow

Far away from the pine tree, I put a lead bullet into the gun and close my eyes. I lift the gun and point in the general direction.

The moment I pull the trigger, I can feel Sylph slightly moving the barrel.

Toong-Puk!

I check and again, it’s a bull’s eye. Up till now, there is only one bullet mark in the tree. It means all my bullets have been hitting the same spot! I’ve also reduced the use of Sylph’s power.

It isn’t right to change the direction of the shot lead bullet. Just moving the barrel a small amount before shooting the gun does not use a lot of power. This is the answer.

There is no real reason for me to do the aiming!

“Let’s do it again!”

“Meow!”*

This time, holding the gun in my hands, I run at full speed.

While running, I take out a lead bullet and put it in the barrel.

“Let’s go!”

With all my power, I jump and in midair, I turn my body and point the gun in the direction of the pine tree.

Of course, it is an awful aim, but I pull the trigger.

At that moment, Sylph accurately moves the barrel

Toong-Pajik!

Bull's eye!

“Good!”

I raise my fists and celebrate.

And so I will be able to get 100 out of 100 no matter which way I shoot. Sylph and the gun is the best possible combination. It was like a match made in heaven.

Chapter 11

To the Arena Again (Part 1)

As the time of the second exam gets shorter, it feels as if my heart is clenching and I can feel the anxiety. However, my heart is stronger than the first day. It is due to the result of my training.

On the first day of training, spirit summoning, and shooting training, I gained the best method by using Sylph in the shooting. Just have Sylph be in charge of the aiming.

The wind spirit, Sylph, knows how to aim the gun and perfectly hit the target.

And so the moment I pull the trigger, Sylph will be responsible for the tiny adjustments by moving the barrel.

100 out of 100!

In extreme terms, with Sylph's help, I can shoot better than a special ops veteran army sniper.

I mean, no matter how I shoot, it shoots as if I've done all the tiny adjustments already.

'It was really good that I picked the spirit summon as the main skill.'

I feel secure in my decision that was easy to make to begin with. You can only select one main skill and you cannot change it.

The main skill, which I have chosen but once, will, in the future, be in all my exams. Thus determining my fighting style and be the most important aspect to it all.

First of all, I think that I have at least buttoned my first button well. But I cannot be so optimistic. My method of having chosen the gun as my weapon leaves my close combat weak.

When a red ape like creature is in front of my face with a stone hatchet, attacking me, how will I have the time to load a gun and shoot?

“The best thing is to just not be in close combat range at all.”

I must act stealthily and not get caught by the enemy. But will that be possible? Let's think back on the first exam.

Location was a forest. The enemy was the red ape that resides there. It was a bastard that was no different than a wild animal that was very familiar with the forest.

To avoid that kind of creature catching onto me whilst I secretly roam about is impossible. Like the first exam, the enemy will probably discover me first and wait for the opportunity to attack.

‘If I knew this would happen, I would've become a navy seal instead*. Who would've thought I'd ever be in this position?’

(TN: Literally says ‘sea army’ so I assume it’s the navy.)

The skills that I had collected in the 2 years of being in the rear troops are of no use to me now.

“There’s no other way. I have to use Sylph very carefully.”

I summon Sylph and ask.

“Sylph. Listen carefully.”

-Meow?

Sylph tilted her face up at me as if to concentrate better on my words.

Aww you cute thing!

“Let’s pretend that you are sitting up on my shoulders.”

-Meow

Sylph actually jumps delicately onto my right shoulder.

Feeling her tail swoosh and wrap around my neck I say.

"And then, from somewhere, a bad bastard creeps up in order to kill me. Before he gets to me, are you able to tell that he is getting closer?"

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head up and down.

"How close does it have to get for you to be able to tell?"

Sylph jumps off my shoulder and spins around like lightning.

Sylph's afterimage draws out the number 200.

"200 meters? You can tell where all the approaching enemies are within 200 meters?"

Impressive. If Sylph had been there for the first exam, would the red ape have been found out right away?

"Alright then, how about this? We have come into a very dangerous zone, and in order to discern what is around me, I send you out to scout. How much area could you scout?"

This time Sylph draws out 900.

"900 meters? You can be 900 meters away from me?"

-Meow

Sylph nods her face.

"So you're saying you can't be more than 900 meters away from me?"

-Meow

"Ok. If my spirit summon level increases, then it's possible to increase this distance?"

-Meow

Nod nod.

After that, Sylph and I chatted and experimented this and that and learned a great deal about spirit summons.

First. Even if I send out Sylph to scout, the summon time does not decrease. Scouting does not use much strength.

Secondly, however, the further Sylph gets from me, the weaker her powers are. And the closer she is to me, the stronger her powers become.

Thirdly. After using up all the time, in 10 hours, the time completely refills. Sylph's summon time is 2 hours. What this means is that every 5 minutes, 1 minute will recover.

We experimented in real life. After using up all the summon time, 5 minutes later I call on Sylph again.

Sylph was summoned for 1 minute, and disappeared once more.

'Ok. The most important probably has been deciphered.'

Inspecting. Scouting. Shooting. I am relying on Sylph a lot.

North, South, East, West. Sylph even will tell me what direction I am facing.

And so the 2 hour summon time is a detrimental weakness to me, but there is a way to recover the summoning time. I will just call on Sylph only when I need her. There is no choice but to in a fight. But in other instances, I just have to call on her once every 5 minutes. She will leave after 60 seconds, then be re-summoned in 5 minutes. I have to be with Sylph in order not to be attacked and that is how this idea was born.

If I am attacked in the 5 minutes where Sylph is not summoned, the situation gets complicated, but that chances of that are not high.

In the 60 seconds she is summoned, I will have her scout as well.

And so, after thinking of many different scenarios, I prepare myself for the 2nd exam. Every morning, I go on the hike and do pushups.

And even this exercise, after 5 days, was not as hard as it was on the 1st day. I think that even in a short time, consistency really pays off.

However, all of my diligent preparation was met with a big barrier. That barrier is...

“SON~!”

Mom abruptly comes into my room. In my complete surprise, I close the laptop where I had been taking notes on this and that regarding the exam.

“Uh. Hey mom?”

“Oh son, what are you quickly covering up?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

And then mom let out an all knowing sigh.

“Son son you are not in your adolescence anymore and you are almost 30...”

“What a misconception! Mom, this isn’t the situation that you think it is...!”

“I know I know. I’m sorry I came in without knocking son.”

“Agh you know what... never mind. Anyway, what are you doing not at work yet?”

“Son should come with me to work.”

“Why would I go to the store? You have dementia already?”

“Oh son, what pretty words.”

I shamelessly shrug it off. But I feel that what is finally expected to come is coming to pass.

The son who spent years studying for the civil exam and is now almost 30, has given up and returned home, is sitting around doing nothing. Mom is anxious, day by day, to drag me into the world of fried chicken.

However, the rest period left for me is only 5 days. I do not want what could possibly be the last 5 days of my life to be spent frying chicken.

“Mom knows you haven’t been back for that long, so I want to let you rest for a while.

But ajumma Ye-rim* says she's sick and can't come to work today."

(TN: Ajumma is a respectful term for a middle aged woman.)

Ugh. She's cornering me into a situation with no escape! Think about it. A way to slip out of this situation...

At that moment, a light bulb goes off in my head.

"Mom, the lady that works with you starting this year is supposed to work 4 days a week and the other days, weren't you going to hire a part time worker? I thought I heard that the lady wanted to shrink her hours because she's 60 this year."

"Oh. Oh my. You remember that son?"

Mom is flustered.

"Of course I remember. You heard the rate for part time hiring at the store is 6000 won (roughly \$6 USD) and lamented to me how that was better than what I was making!"

"You should've studied with that kind of memory."

My thoughts exactly.

Like the bbundegi bastard angel said, now that my life is in danger, my head spins round and round.

"Anyway, starting next month, I'll go out to the store and work too. Let it slide for now? At least while I'm home, I do the cleaning and the laundry."

"That's true. Since you've been home, the house has been clean. I don't even see any hair in the bathroom strainer."

"You see? I (Sylph) clean so well."

"Alright. I'll let it slide. But starting next month, if you don't work, you don't get an allowance. Ok son?"

"Yes ma'am."

Mom leaves for work and I let out a deep sigh.

I have lots to do in preparation for my exam.

Chapter 12

To the Arena again (Part 2)

The time flew by quickly.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 11 hours

“I’m going to go crazy.”

I feel like I’m going to lose my mind from the anxiety. I’ll fall asleep tonight and I’ll be called to the Arena to fight.

I’m so scared. Will I be able to survive?

After spending 10 days with family, my will to survive has grown even more.

Mom. Noona. Hyun-ji.

It wrenches my guts to think of mom, noona, and Hyun-ji leaning over my dead body and crying.

‘I will live. I can live. Kim Hyun-ho.’

I forcefully hypnotize myself and set out from the house.

Today, I have to do some shopping.

I go to the nearby outlet shopping mall. The reason I come here is to buy clothes to

wear for my second exam.

I think back to the first exam. I floundered about in the forest in my underwear. And the lesson that I can learn from that is that you get called to the exam in whatever clothes you are wearing when you fall asleep.

So then what happens if I wear a full outfit and fall asleep with my shoes on? With that train of thought, shoes and clothes are important preparation. I have come here to buy combat attire now.

'My army clothes are in the closet, but even if I die, I really don't want to wear those again.'

If I die in the 2nd exam, my body will be found in my army gear. It'll be so pathetic to die wearing army gear on top of dying at a young age.

I buy some shoes first. I picked trekking shoes that are suitable for multiple environments and are also waterproof. The price was a bit crazy, but I close my eyes and bought them.

For pants, I picked cargo pants with lots of pockets. I thought of tough jeans or sweats that would be comfortable to work in, but the perk of many pockets is the most important.

'Oh. Should I buy some gloves and a hat too?'

Gloves for protecting my hands and a hat for protecting my head.

It is good to take whatever I can and all of it.

I return home and its already evening. The remaining time is only 3 hours.

I look over all my gear to check if I have forgotten anything. I sit down at my desk, pull out a pen and paper, and begin to write.

[To my loving family.]

It is in case I do not come back alive. I write about how much I love my family. I wanted to write it simply, but at the thought that this is the last goodbye, the words keep getting longer. The tears well up in my eyes. I cannot stop them so I cover my mouth

and cry quietly. I put the letter in my drawer and prepared to go to sleep.

I put on three pairs of underwear and three pairs of socks. It is possible that the exam lasts for a couple of days.

The new pants and shoes. A shirt with a sweater on top and over that, an outdoor jacket.

'This all makes me feel like a person about to go on a hike.'

I think maybe, and shoved a Swiss army knife and lighter, a small pair of binoculars, a smart phone, and a bag of candy into my pockets.

'I probably can't take these items with me?'

Amongst the karma prizes, there was a 'turn an object into an item' option. So if I don't use karma to turn things into items, I won't be able to take them with me. However, you never know, so I pack them anyway. Because you never know.

'Mom. I'll be back.'

I turn off the lights and lay in my bed.



Darn... I'm so nervous, sleep does not come to me. It's also because I've worn this and that and I'm very uncomfortable. I usually sleep naked.

"Board retrieval."

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 27 minutes 41 seconds

“Damn. Time sure does pass by.”

I let out a scoffing laugh. I have never felt that life was so precious.

With my eyes open, I look at the time limit changing, 1 second at a time, on the board.

After the 27 minutes, the final countdown begins.

5 seconds, 4 seconds, 3... 2... 1...

At the same time it turns to 0, my consciousness becomes hazy.

Definitely, as expected, it is a system that when the time comes, you automatically fall asleep



“Welcome! Aren’t you glad to see me again?”

The baby angel always obnoxiously greets me.

“I’d be more welcome if you would put on some underwear. What is there to boast about that you leave it out to dangle like that?”

“Aww. I even gave you a special privilege and you diss me as soon as you see my face? I’m hurt.”

“A special privilege?”

“I gave you a special service because I approved of the fervor of which you prepared for the exam.”

“What service?”

“Look around for yourself.”

And then I finally see my appearance.

First of all, the training shoes, two gloves, hat, everything was as I had fallen asleep in.

“Yup. You come in the way you are dressed.”

“Yes. You may use what you wear, including your shoes. Other things, you cannot.”

And now that I look again, I don’t see my wristwatch. And then I look in my pockets, and the lighter and Swiss army knife that I had packed, are not there. But the bag of candy I had put in my cargo pants is.

“Your service is a single bag of candy?”

“Yes. It is only special this one time. Aren’t you thankful?”

“Yeah. Real thankful. You want one?”

“Yes.”

The baby angel put out his two hands toward me.

I rip open the bag and give him a piece.

“How is it? This much preparation and I would say it’s a 100 out of 100.”

“I’ll give you a 98. You have done the best you could to prepare on your own.”

“Well what’s the missing 2%?”

“What do you think?”

This bastard...

The baby angel gleefully speaks.

“If you can guess it, I’ll give you 2 karma. Ok. Time limit 60 seconds. Start.”

I am startled by the sudden quiz. 2 karma is the price of 100 bullets.

What is it? What did I miss?

I think hard. I squeeze my brain and an answer doesn’t come to mind.

'Hold on. Didn't that bastard just say it? That I have done everything I could to prepare on my own?'

And the answer suddenly comes to mind.

"Damn it."

Without realizing it, I swear. It's the result of my own regret.

"Have you discovered it?"

I grind my teeth and reply.

"...I was unable to meet another examinee."

"Correct! 2 karma will be given to examinee Kim Hyun-ho. You must be happy?"

"Happy? My ass I'm happy!"

I had forgotten about such an important aspect. And there were plenty of hints!

'I say again, but examinee Kim Hyun-ho received a really great grade in your first exam.'

'Normally, examinees cannot do like Kim Hyun-ho has.'

The baby angel had not forthrightly hidden the fact that there are other examinees like me. But I had not realized as such. The very first thing that I should've done would have been to find and meet other examinees and receive information and tips.

"Hold on. Can I go around talking about the exam and the Arena and it doesn't matter?"

"It doesn't matter. You could do tricks with Sylph and become a YouTube star and it wouldn't matter."

"..."

Towards my frowning face, the baby angel pats me on the shoulder.

"C'mon now. Didn't you just get 2 karma for free? And you have a bag of candy."

“Can I use the 2 karma now?”

“Go ahead.”

I call on the board and with the karma prize, I obtain 100 bullets. It is a relief that I have been able to get more bullets.

“Ok. If all your preparations are done, shall we find out a bit more about the 2nd exam?”

“It’s not like before where you don’t tell me anything and just drop me into it?

“Hee hee. I, too, enjoy examinee Kim Hyun-ho’s endless pondering, riding the poop rope.*”

(TN: According to Gampa in the comments: “Riding the poop rope” actually means “the poop rope is burning.” Basically imagine there’s a rope that’s connected to your ass(hole) that’s burning like a fuse. You would be panicking and running around like a chicken with its head cut off, right? (just like our dear mc here)))

My fists cry.

Can I use the karma prize and just slap this bastard on the cheek once?

“My face slaps are expensive.”

“...”

The baby angel read my mind.

“Anyway, the first exam was just a warm up. And starting at the 2nd exam, it’s the real deal.”

As so we returned to real talk. I tense up and concentrate on the baby angel’s words. I cannot lose a single word. Any passing word can become a hint.

“Starting now, you will carry out the exam with another examinee.”

“Another examinee?”

So that’s why he gave me that quiz.

“How many people?”

“Apart from examinee Kim Hyun-ho, 4 other people.”

“What kind of people?”

“Look for yourself. They’re right next to you.”

“Who’s next to m-OHHHH!”

I’m completely taken by surprise, I’m not alone.

“Gakk!”

“Wakk! Fuck, what is this!”

“What?!”

“.....”

The other people around me all yell in surprise. The space where only the angel and I stood is occupied suddenly by four more people!

With surprise in our eyes, we stare at each other.

A girl, in her 20’s, in sweats and tennis shoes.

A man, who seems about 40, with an angry expression and a big build.

A young guy about college age.

And a guy, about mid 30’s, with a cold expression on his face.

After looking at the four people, I return my gaze to the baby angel.

The baby angel clapped his hands together.

“Now now, pay attention. You are all examinees who have just finished your first exam. There are those with impressive marks, those with so-so average marks, and those who cause grave concern. Regardless, from now on, you will be going through the

exam together so good luck."

With a flick of his finger, the exam door appeared.

"Hey, you rat shit sparrow bastard! You ought to explain a bit about the exam!"

The 40 year old man yelled out.

The baby angel made a happy smile.

"But I don't want to?"

"Why this arrogant bastard...!"

"You want to get hit with lightning again?"

The angry man twitches. It seems he was also hit with lightning before.

Perhaps it is from his nasty speech and reckless behavior, but I get the feeling he is a thug. His expression is such and he doesn't seem the type to get along with others.

'Will it be okay? I don't know if it will go well being teamed up with this person.'

I don't think I am the only one thinking this kind of thought.

The girl in her 20's and the college guy are both staring with nervous eyes at the angry looking, middle-aged man.

Only the man in his 30's, with the cold unchanging expression, looks on without a blink.

Now is not the time for this. First I must verify what the exam is.

"Board retrieval."

I retrieve my board.

As I do so, the others follow suit and say 'board retrieval'. And for real, their boards were not visible.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive until the time limit

-Time limit: 7 days

“One, one week?”

“Survive?”

The girl and college student are surprised.

“Hey sparrow! All it is, is holding onto my breath for a week?”

The thuggish man asked the baby angel. The baby angel nodded his head and replied.

“That is correct. You’re annoying, so go on your way or I will hit with lightning. 1, 2, 3, 4...

“Oh fuck! I’ll go, geez, I’m going!”

Perhaps due to his fear of the lightning, the thuggish man opened the mission door first and left.

After him, we took our turns passing through the mission door.

Chapter 13

To the Arena Again (Part 3)

Like the first exam, it's a forest.

"Eh Nimi*, it's the forest again."

The thuggish guy mumbled.

We were all lost, looking around at our surroundings. I too, felt a strange energy looking around the forest's environment; it wasn't new.

Everyone stood where they were and continued to stare and so I picked up my courage and spoke.

"So was everyone's first exam the red ape?"

"Yes."

"Correct."

The girl in her 20's and the college kid spoke.

"What? So all of you had to fight that fricking monkey too?" asked the thuggish guy.

Instead of an answer, I just nodded my head up and down. It didn't feel nice that he was using informal speech at the get go.*

(TN: In Korea, you usually use formal speech when first meeting people and progress to informal speech when you become friends.)

"So it's that forest from then."

The 30 year old guy, that hadn't said a single word, spoke for the first time.

The girl and the college kid nodded.

So it is. This is the forest from the first exam.

"So I guess that means that this forest is the location where 5 red apes died?"

"I suppose so," replied the college student.

"Then doesn't that possibly mean that this exam, in addition to red apes, the mission is to survive for a week?"

At my words, the thuggish guy lets out a big grin.

"What. It's not like that monkey thing was scary anyway. You just have to beat them to death as they appear."

"It's possible that tens or hundreds might come in bunches."

"How would you know that, bastard?"

Ok. I really don't like this ajusshi.*

(TN: Respectful term for middle aged men.)

"Monkeys and primates live in communities. The red apes live in communities and if those five of them died here, might not their comrades come here for revenge?"

"..."

The thuggish guy had nothing to say to that so I continued to speak.

"So far that is only a speculation but nonetheless, I think we should stop standing here and move. We have to get water and food as well."

"That makes sense."

The college student agreed.

"I think so too." The girl agreed in a cautious voice.

Indeed these two people have good cooperation. The problem is the thuggish delinquent ajusshi and the cold, wordless 30 year old guy.

"Well, since we have to find a safe place to stay put for a week anyway."

The embarrassed thug middle aged man spoke and briskly walked forward, setting the way. He even just decides which direction to go in all on his own.

I get the uneasy feeling that as time goes on, this man will cause us problems.

But for now, there is no other way.

I follow in behind him and the others begin to follow suit.

"Ah, fuck, no cigarettes."

The thug middle aged man dug through his pockets and mumbled. Walking a few steps and mumbled, another few steps and more mumbling. The thug man made us uncomfortable with his continuous swearing.

'I wonder what all these people picked with their karma prize?'

I am most curious about that.

The fighting style will change according to what skills and weapons we have.

We have to know what each other's fighting style is in order to synchronize/complement each other.

'Now that I think of it, didn't the angel say this?'

"There are those here with great grades, modest so-so grades, and those with grave cause for concern."

We are 5 people.

So, I can guess that there are two with great grades, two people with modest grades, and the remaining one person with a bad grade.

The bad grade was probably received by the 20 year old girl. Because, well, she's a girl.

Then there are two with great grades. I am sure one of the two is me. So then who is the other?

'I don't think it's the college student, but you never know. A guy like me got a good grade so I can't judge by just by appearances.'

At the least it's probably not the thuggish man. Because he's too stupid.

Should I ask? What their skills and weapons are?

I was pondering these things at the time.

"I am Park Go-chan."

The one who opened his mouth was the thuggish man.

"You mention Park Go-chan on the Gangnam night streets and nobody doesn't know me."

He's definitely a thug.

"Spent 20 years on those streets and there are more than 10 people who met their fates with my hands. Unlike you guys, I am familiar with this kind of thing. So you all just trust me and follow me and you'll be good."

This chattering Park Go-chan suddenly put his hand on the shoulder of the 20 year old girl that had been walking behind him.

"Got it, miss?"

"Wha-what are you doing."

The girl got flustered and brushed off Park Go-chan's hand.

Park Go-chan brazenly grabbed her shoulder again and swooshed her into his arms and spoke.

"Miss, I know what you're thinking. You are scared to be in this situation? I will protect you from now on. How's that? Thankful?"

"Let, let go please."

Paling in the daylight, the girl in a shaky and sad voice resisted.

The college guy, not knowing what to do just stared.

I feel the same.

Starting from a while ago, the passive behavior Park Go-chan began revealing his true nature.

This place, the Arena, does not have any laws to protect us, and Park Go-chan, having started to reveal his true nature, is bound to enact tyranny.

And when that time comes, it is clear without seeing what will happen to the girl.

'It cannot be.'

I, too, am fearful of this Park Go-chan who says he was a gangster, but I can't turn a blind eye to this behavior.

I have to continue taking the exam with that girl and if I don't act now, I am approving of this Park Go-chan's behavior.

I take the girl away from Park Go-chan and speak.

"Um, she is uncomfortable so let's not do this..."

Puck! (Hitting sound)

I collapse, sitting onto the ground I grab my left cheek and moan.

"You fucking bastard. Who are you treating like shit? Tiny fucker!"

Puck!

Park Go-chan kicks me in the side.

"Kuk!"

The air got knocked out of me. I grip my side and roll on the floor.

With the pain, the feeling of injustice comes flooding in. Why do I have to get hit by a shit like this? He thinks I'm weaker than him so he fearlessly throws his violence at

me.

‘Should I summon Sylph? Should I threaten him with the gun?’

These thoughts race by my mind.

“I didn’t like you from the beginning. Trailing little bastard pretending to know shit and yammering on with your mouth.”

Park Go-chan is threatening to establish his power in the group. What kind of immature high school behavior is this?

He will probably assert his power and then boss the others around like servants.

“Huk huk huk...” (Crying/weeping sound)

As the situation explodes into violence, the girl begins to weep.

To get beaten to a pulp in front of a girl! It really hurts my pride. Based on my thoughts, all I want to do is call Sylph to pull out this thug bastard’s throat or shoot him with the gun.

“Please, please don’t fight.”

The young guy who looks to be in college steps up. But all it does is catch the mean eyes of Park Go-chan.

“And what are you, you shit.”

“I, I am...”

“Equip.”

In Park Go-chan’s right hand appeared a sword. Having seen the blue tint blade, the alarmed college student takes a few steps back.

“What, what are you doing?! ”

“Might as well do this now, let’s arrange a pecking order. Anyone with a problem with me, come on out.”

It became as quiet as a dead mouse. Of course, the girl and the college student also became like chicks eating honey.

'He wants to establish a hierarchy by fighting? Is this guy crazy?'

Whether we like or hate each other, in order to survive, we have to be cooperating comrades and he wants to fight?

At first thought, I want to summon Sylph and my gun and intimidate him too.

But this guy is a thug.

Even if the fight were to become a stalemate, I don't know what kind of vengeance he may carry afterwards.

On top of that, his head will be full of thoughts on messing with the girl. A man who has gone crazy with sexual desire will fail to keep his anger in check.

Perhaps because he thinks he has completely controlled us, Park Go-chan turns his attention to the response-less 30 year old guy.

"Hey, guy."

"..."

The 30 year old guy shows no response. But he is expressionless without looking at anything. He doesn't appear at all to be intimidated by Park Go-chan.

"What about you? You got a problem with me?"

"..."

"Fuck, give me an answer!"

You can cut the atmosphere with a knife.

The 30 year old guy shows no response or fear. And now due to pride, Park Go-chan can't back down. Park Go-chan approaches the guy and shoves his face close.

"Why no reply? Are you a mute? Pissed your pants? If you can't answer at least nod

your head."

If he nods, it seems it will be taken as a sign of surrender and this will all be over. Even Park Go-chan doesn't want this to go to a fight.

And then at that moment.

Schwick!

The guys' right hand moves like lightning and smacks Park Go-chan in the face. His pointer and middle finger are resting atop Park Go-chan's eyes.

"What, fuck what is this!"

The startled Park Go-chan flails his arms and backs up.

"Fishing out eyeballs with fingers is very easy."

Finally, from the guy's heavy lips, came forth creepy words.

The guy spoke to Park Go-chan, whose face has firmly frozen.

"Men, women, old, young, it's possible for everyone. Using five fingers, one is bound to poke the eye. However, not everyone who can do it will try."

The guy's masterful speech and strong accent was like that of a Chinese person or a Korean Chinese.

"What do you think of me? Do you think me a person that will hesitate to harm another human?"

"Sh-shit, what are you saying, you Korean Chinese bastard." His speech is still threatening but his voice has gotten a lot quieter than before.

"Didn't you say 'let's establish a pecking order'?"

"What, what if I did?"

Park Go-chan's voice begins to shake.

A cold grin appears on the guys lips.

“Come at me”

“You, you bastard? You can’t see this? You think I’m joking?”

Park Go-chan once more waves his sword around for all to see, threatening.

“I see it. So I say, come at me.”

“This fucking bastard...!”

The volatile tension!

“Um, shouldn’t we be stopping this?”

The college student approaches me and carefully asks. I shake my head.

“Let’s leave them be.”

“What?”

“He won’t go at him.”

I tell him about Park Go-chan’s type.

“This kind of person won’t fight if they think they’ll get injured. That’s why all they do is threaten.”

It’s just like the bullies from high school. They only bother the weaklings who can’t fight back. They never touched the students who had the courage to fight.

Even thugs don’t tackle the kind of average person that will call the cops and scream and put up a fight. They only suck the blood out of the people that are too scared to resist and use those people as targets.

“Damn. It’s not like I can kill you either. Consider yourself lucky.”

As expected, Park Go-chan puts down his sword and backs down first. Everyone lets out a sigh of relief. We all thought the situation finally came to a close.

“I said come at me.”

The words emanate everywhere. The surprised Park Go-chan turns around.

Am I hallucinating? I feel like there is a malevolent energy flowing from the guy's eyes.

“This bastard, you really wanna go at it!”

“Shouldn't you take responsibility for the words you spit out?”

The beads of sweat began to form on Park Go-chan's forehead.

‘The words ‘I shouldn't have touched this guy’ were probably running through his head.’

“Hey, right now, we shouldn't be fighting each other, let's just stop it here shall we?”

Park Go-chan speaks, trying really hard not to show his fear.

“I will count to 10.” The guy speaks. “If you don't come at me, I'm going to pluck out an eye. I hate people who don't take responsibility for their words the most.”

“Hey, hey now. I said let's stop it here.”

“1, 2, 3, 4...”

As the numbers raced to 10, Park Go-chan's face became awash with horror. Even as onlookers, we could tell.

Thug Park Go-chan is nothing. The real scary person is that guy

“...9, 10.”

In the end, Park Go-chan, who couldn't attack, held on to his sword, which was shaking like a leaf in the wind.

Staring at this, the guy spoke.

“This is your first and last warning.”

And then the guy turned around.

Park Go-chan's face became blank, as if he had just returned from hell.

'It's that person!'

The one other person with the high score besides me. I'm sure of it.

Chapter 14

Comrades (Part 1)

"I am Kim Hyun-ho and up to a while ago, I was studying for the civil exam. What are your names?"

I ask this after we walk for a while in a tense and awkward atmosphere. You should at least exchange names, you bitches.

The college student with the good cooperation answers.

"I am Lee Joon-ho. I am a new student that was just accepted into Korea University*"

(TN: Korea University is the Harvard of Korea.)

He is indeed a college student. He did look young, but to think just a wee child of 20.

"Lee Hye-su... I was a company employee."

The 20 something year old woman's name is Lee Hye-su. Seeing as how she used past tense, it sounds like she quit. And because Park Go-chan had already gone wild with his introduction, the only one left is the 30 year old guy. But even if he said nothing, we had no intention of saying anything about it.

"Kang Chun-seung, a martial artist from Shanghai."

A martial artist from China!

And so we found out why Kang Chun-seung showed no fear at Park Go-chan.

Park Go-chan's expression became ugly. If he had actually attacked him, he would have lost all face.

After name exchanging was done, we once again continued to walk in an awkward atmosphere.

Lee Joon-ho was the only one who barely kept up a minimal conversation.

Company employee Lee Hye-Su replied with short comments to our minimalistic conversation, but probably due to the shock she received of almost suffering the abuse from Park Go-chan, her words dwindled.

“My throat is slowly getting dry. Where do you think the water might be?”

It was Lee Joon-ho’s words.

“I will try and find some. Sylph!”

After starting the second exam, I summon Sylph for the first time.

-Meow.

Sylph appeared in the middle of the air and rubbed her face against my cheek.

“Oh? What is that?”

Lee Joon-ho asked, completely surprised. Lee Hye-su, Park Go-chan, and Kang Chan-seung too were all surprised and looked in my direction. I explained.

“This is the spirit summon skill I earned with my karma prize. She is a wind spirit by the name of Sylph.”

“Spirit summon? Of the assist skills, there was that?”

“Main skill.”

At my words, many people reacted.

“Your main skill?!”

“That’s your main skill?!”

“Main skill?”

Lee Joon-ho, Park Go-chan, and even Kang Chan-seung all had a surprised reaction.

The Kang Chan-seung, who up to know had been of so few words, asked me.

“How much karma did you get from the first exam?”

“500 karma.”

“...!”

Kang Chan-seung’s entire face is engrossed in shock. So it seems my score was significantly higher than his.

“Are you joking? How could someone like you get 500 karma?”

Park Go-chan starts the nitpicking again. I shrug my shoulders.

“I was told it was the result of evaluating potential rather than ability. Anyway, with that, I got the spirit summon and a rifle. If you can’t believe it, you want to see?”

I summoned the single shot magic gun and bandolier. The bandolier had an extra 100 lead bullets in it and was thicker than before.

“It doesn’t even make sense...”

Park Go-chan’s expression was seemed that this was difficult to believe.

Humph, now you see? I am not someone for you to laugh at or dismiss. At some point, I will make you pay back for having hit me.

“Sylph, look for water nearby.”

-Meow!

Sylph swiftly flew away.

In the meantime, I ask the others.

“What did you guys get with you karma prizes? I think we should know so that we coordinate better when we get into fights later on.”

“You really are amazing. On my first exam, I got 270 karma. All the main skills were

400 karma so I was unable to learn any.”

The cooperative Lee Joon-ho answered first.

“Without any other choices, I selected the secondary skill, ‘physical strength buff’ and learned it to level 2, and with the leftover karma I got a shield. I will show you.”

As he was speaking, Lee Joon-ho summoned a round leather shield. It seems he has no weapon.

“What is the physical strength buff?”

I hadn’t seen the assist skills and am curious.

“Just like it sounds, it enhances your physical strength skill. Entry level 1 makes your body that of a healthy adult man, and level 2 gave me a body with exceptional athleticism.”

As if shy about it, Lee Joon-ho scratched his head.

“I’m usually weak bodied, so I started with level 2 of it.”

Lee Joon-ho is rather short, but his build looks fit. But it seems that it’s thanks to the physical strength buff assist skill he learned rather than from lots of exercise.

“That is a really good skill. My body is not that good either; may I ask how much karma that cost?”

“The entry level 1 is 100 karma; entry level 2 is 150 karma.”

That is the revolution of the health industry.

I am a person with a complex from my ‘nothing-to-see skinny body.’ But if I get the assist skill, I wouldn’t even need to exercise and can be an moem-jjang!*

(TN: It doesn’t translate well into English. But it kind of means to be an awesome bodied person.)

‘When this exam is over, I should get that right away.’

Not from my greed for a good body but because fitness is an important aspect, is all.”

“Ah damn, I got 250 karma. You saying I’m not as good as that dude?”

Park Go-chan whines and swears at the same time. The startled Lee Joon-ho draws back in fear.

“I received entry level 3 physical strength buff and a sword.”

“Level 3?”

“You think I’m the same as you guys? My fitness was originally good, bastards.”

“I see.”

Park Go-chan had originally a body that fit into the entry level 2 buff so he was able to learn right into level 3.

‘So if I have the fitness of a healthy adult male, I’ll be able to learn starting at level 2.’

I have learned a good truth.

Now it is Lee Hye-su’s turn. She paused for a second and then carefully spoke.

“With 100 karma, I learned physical strength correction entry level 1. Other than that I don’t have anything. I’m sorry...”

“Haha, that’s okay, miss. I said I’d protect you.”

At Park Go-chan’s devious comment, Lee Hye-su goes pale.

-Meow.

Right on time, Sylph returns.

“Did you find water?”

-Meow!

Sylph suggested a left direction and with speed wrote ‘293’

"Thanks. I'll call you again later."

I un-summon Sylph and speak to the group.

"300 meters from here there is water"

We head off in the direction Sylph pointed. As we walked I asked Kang Chan-seung.

"What did you choose with your prize?"

"400 karma. Aura control, entry level 1"

400 karma. Lower than me.

I kind of get an idea of how everyone fought in the first exam.

The hiding red ape attacks but Kang Chan-seung, like a martial artist, quickly avoids it, retaliates, and knocks out the red ape I'm sure. Anyway, the aura control seems very fitting for a martial artist.

But then Kang Chan-seung's words continue.

"Right now, I am entry level 4."

"Huh?"

"Even without karma, through training, it was possible to raise the level."

It was a revelation worth a shock.

That you can raise your skill level through training and not karma!

'Huh? But there would only have been 11 days to train the aura control?'

The question forms and I ask Kang Chan-seung.

"Did you raise 3 levels in 11 days?"

"Aura control turned out to have similar principles to Tai chi. I have trained in Baguazhang* and fanziquan* my entire life."

(TN: *Bāguà zhǎng* is known for circle walking. It literally means ‘eight trigram palm.’ *Fānziquán* routines are usually quite short and very fast. It literally means ‘rotating fist.’)

I became terrified at Kang Chan-seung’s awesomeness.

In other words he just didn’t have the aura but from the beginning, he had the capability to start at entry level 4!

It’s to the point where I cannot believe he is an examinee who has just finished their first exam. I want to see him fight and see how strong he is.

Anyway, I have a basic idea of how we should fight in my head.

I will shoot from a distance, and the three men will fight in front and protect Lee Hye-su.

‘In the end, Lee Hye-su is the problem. Since she has nothing but the physical strength buff entry level 1. Then again, since she has the fitness of a healthy adult male, perhaps she will be the same or better than me?’

Lee Joon-ho has nothing but a shield so he will have to find a weapon.

‘I’m sure cutting wood into two spears should be worth something?’

According to my guess, if the opponent we fight is a red ape, then a spear will be sufficient enough.

I wonder how far we’ve walked?

We arrive at a trickling stream.

We can see a rabbit that had been drinking water quickly dash away.

“Sylph!”

-Meow?

Sylph is summoned.

"Catch the rabbit!"

-Meow!

Sylph fleeted by into the woods after the rabbit that left no trace.

A moment later, Sylph appears with the rabbit's neck bit in her mouth. The rabbit bitten in Sylphs teeth just dangled in the air. For now I capture the rabbit by grabbing its ears. Then I ask Sylph.

"Can you make the wind as sharp as a knife and cut the rabbit's carotid?"

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

I carry the rabbit to the stream/brook. I hold the rabbit over the stream and say to Sylph.

"Do it."

_ -Meow!

Using the wind like a knife, Sylph slit the rabbit's throat.

Chwak! (gushing sound)

Blood poured out from the rabbit's neck. The stream turned red in an instant.

The rabbit took its final breath and its body relaxes. I grab the back legs and flip it around so the blood all pours into the stream.

"Oh, she is quite useful?"

Park Go-chan is lightly moved.

Up to that point is okay, but then he adds useless words.

"From now on, you be in charge of food."

My face grows an angry red.

'That thug bastard. Who is he to be giving out orders?'

I already have a grudge from being hit before.

In my mind, I'm thinking that I want to slit his throat too.

'Wait and see.'

My insides boil up.

Chapter 15

Comrades (Part 2)

Our group shoves their faces in the stream and drink water. I'm thirsty too, of course, but I have to hold the rabbit until all the blood is drained. But how long do I have to hold it?

"Give it here. I can hold it."

Lee Joon-ho has finished drinking his water and approaches.

"Thank you."

Of everyone in the group, I like Lee Joon-ho the best.

I drink from the stream and by the time I'm done washing my face, the rabbit has been drained of all its blood.

Now I have to cut it but, of all of the people here, no one has a knife. Without another option, even that gets left to Sylph.

Sylph cuts the rabbit using the wind like a knife. Because I had done basic studying on the internet of how to butcher animals, I was able to properly give commands.

After cutting the lower belly and ankles, the hide comes off.

"Ook!" (like "UGH!")

Lee Hye-su, who sees this, lets out a gag. I understand. I'm going crazy, how much worse must it be for a girl?

After cutting the head off and completely taking off the skin, a red body is what's left.

Using Sylph again, she starts cutting from the rectum towards the belly; we had large intestine – small intestine- liver- heart. The liver and heart we can eat, so it was put aside and the rest was buried in the ground.

The group watches my dismantling project.

Killing one life and dismantling it is a first for me too and my hands shake.

'Even so, it must become familiar.'

Using the stream water to rinse all the foreign matter off, the rabbit's body is finished and looks good to eat.

"Wow, you knew how to do this stuff too?"

The on looking Lee Joon-ho is impressed and amazed. I shrug my shoulders.

"No, I watched from the internet and just studied it a bit. Thanks to Sylph, it did end up getting done though."

"Your prep work is really good. That must be why hyung-nim* earned the most karma. Ah, is it okay that I call you hyung-nim?"

(TN: Hyung is what a male would call an older brother/male. Nim is an ending to show respect. So Hyung-nim is kind of calling him honorable older brother. It can also mean boss in some situations.)

"Just call me hyung."

(TN: Up to here, they have been speaking formally to each other.)

"Really?" (said informally.)

It was easy getting closer to this friendlier, easy going Lee Joon-ho.

"If you're all done, hurry up and grill it. I'm hungry"

Park Go-chan leaned his back against a tree and slumped onto the floor. Man, that guy, seriously.

I ask Kang Chan-seong.

"Shall we rest here for the night? Or should we move a little more?"

“Do what you want”

Kang Chan-seong’s reply is without respect.

‘Geez, this is so frustrating.’

Kang Chan-seong is a character equally as annoying as Park Go-chan, but for different reasons.

He is the strongest of us and the only viable person to whom Park Go-chan can’t do anything to. If he would step up to the leader position, our teamwork would be lot better, but he consistently acts without interest.

‘Does he lack tact?’

I had asked Kang Chan-seong on purpose so he could say the opposite of Park Go-chan’s thoughtless opinion to rest here.

Stopping here to eat in broad daylight when there might be a hoard of red apes chasing is a bad idea.

‘There’s no other choice.’

I decide to step up myself.

“For now, let’s move a bit further and later in the evening we will set up camp.”

“Ok, I got it. Let’s eat first, you bastard.”

“Then we would need a fire.”

“Build one, asshole.”

“Do you know how to build one?”

“What?”

“I asked if you know how to build a fire. I think it will be difficult and you want to do one now and do it again later when we set up camp?”

"It'll be fine if I just do it then, bastard."

Park Go-chan's voice becomes steadily louder. One more word and he'll explode.

My heart thumps and thumps and shakes. Okay, I am not familiar with fighting. I am scared of a gangster.* If we were to fight I might win, but I am still scared. We aren't in a position to fight and I don't want to raise the face reddening tension.

(TN: The word he used is like someone that uses violence to solve problems.)

I turn my head and speak to Kang Chan-seong.

"I think first we should keep moving, sound good?"

"Let's."

"He said let's?"

I ask Park Go-chan.

"You sh—."

Park go-chan looks like he is going to explode. Kang Chan-seong says let's, so he can't go against it.

I take the rabbit and its hide and we start to move again. We move, following the flowing stream. It would be good if there was a safe location like a cave.

And then, Park Go-chan approaches me.

"Hey, Kim Hyun-ho"

"Yes?"

"Be careful"

"..."

"If you talk back to me like that one more time, I'll rip your head off. Got it?"

“Like Sylph did?”

“...!”

This time, Park Go-chan flinches. No matter what evil reputation he had as a thug, Sylph is way better at the head ripping.

Honestly, I’m surprised myself. I had fantasized so much about ordering Sylph to cut his throat, that the reply came out as a reflex.

Park Go-chan looked at me with scared eyes for a while and we continued to walk.

‘Haaa.....’ (like a sigh)

I let out a sigh.

It’s now just the first day. It’s already so tiring and difficult even though we haven’t even gotten into a fight with the red apes.

As we walked, every now and then, I summoned Sylph to scout the area and look for a cave where we might be able to set up camp.

After walking for a couple hours, Sylph discovered a cave. Only after crossing through a switchback trail were we able to arrive at the cave.

“I think it will be a good idea to set up camp here tonight, yes?”

Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su nod their heads. Park Go-chan and Kang Chan-seong are still without comment.

Well, even so, I take it as a consensus and prepare to start a small fire.

“We have to build a fire, so everyone gather dry twigs and leaves and straw from around here please.”

I say such and I to head from the cave.

Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su moved as soon as my words left my lips, Park Go-chan sat in the cave and didn’t move a muscle.

Kang Chan-seong walked off in a direction different from ours.



Joon-ho, Lee Hye-su, and I went together and gathered twigs and leaves and straw.

“Joon-ho,* you, and miss Hye-su also, will you be needing a weapon?” I ask.

(TN: He dropped the ‘Lee’ from Lee Joon-ho’s name because they are speaking informally now.)

“Yes...”

“I need one. Speaking of, I was looking around for something I could use as a weapon.”

“What do you think if we cut some wood into spears?”

“Wah (wow), then I would be grateful.”

“Thank you.”

It seemed that Lee Hye-su also wanted it, because she nodded her head deeply

It’s a forest that overshadows the Amazon and there are an abundance of disgustingly large trees. I grab just any tree and begin the project.

“Sylph.”

-Meow

Again, I summoned Sylph.

“Please cut me two branches longer than 2 meters. Ones that grew as straight as possible.”

-Meow.

Sylph fleets on by and cuts two branches and offers them to me.

I continue to use Sylph to cut off the smaller branches and cut the limb into an even

thickness.

As the branch took shape as a spear, the tip was cut sharp. And so the two wooden spears were completed.

“It’s a little clumsy but for now, use these.”

I hand them to Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su.

“Thanks, hyung.”

“Thank you.”

For firewood, I use Sylph to cut a few more branches into logs.

When we return to the cave, Kang Chan-seong has returned also. At his feet were a stack of logs.

I wondered how he could have produced the logs without a weapon, but looking at the condition of his firewood I could hazard a guess.

‘Hul (geez), he broke them with his fists.’

It seems that using fists along with aura control are able to break thick branches like those.

“Hyung, do you know how to start a fire?”

“Yup.”

In anticipation for such situations, I had done some fire play as practice on Mount Taejo in the dead of night.

“I’ll help.”

“Then grab this wood and this and keep rubbing them together.”

“Ok.”

Joon-ho took a small branch and started to strongly rub it into the firewood.

He had to rub for a long time, but maybe thanks to the entry level 2 physical strength buff, Joon-ho was able to keep rubbing. Impressive. I want to quickly gain the physical strength buff.

The frictional heat starts to produce smoke and I summon Sylph and order.

“Sylph, concentrate the oxygen.”

-Meow

To think that the wind spirit Sylph even had a talent like this. Sylph gathers leaves and straw and raises the oxygen concentration.

Hwaluk-. (swoosh)

The fire blazed up.

“It’s done!”

Joon-ho was so happy he almost jumped.

The gathered leaves, straw, and dry twigs were put into the fire and then we threw in the firewood. The fire in front of the cave was a success.

Chapter 16

Comrades (Part 3)

The fire blazed up.

“It’s done!”

Joon-ho was so happy he almost jumped.

The gathered leaves, straw, and dry twigs were put into the fire and then we gathered in the firewood. The fire in front of the cave was a success.

“Now, it’s time to grill the rabbit...”

“Should we roast it whole?”

“Yeah. We’ll stab it through with a skewer and rotate it over the fire.”

“Will this work?”

Joon-ho hands out the wooden spear I made him.

“Sure. If it becomes unusable, I’ll make you another one”

“Ok.”

I stabbed the spear through the rabbit and placed it over the fire.

I motion to Lee Hye-su to call her over.

“Miss Hye-su, please grill this”

“...Ok”

Lee Hye-su obediently grabbed the spear and began to grill the rabbit. I spoke to her quietly.

"If you contribute by doing a lot to these things, the karma you earn should increase. Miss Hye-su, you have a disadvantage in fighting, so try to do more of these things."

I continue to speak in a low voice.

"Earn the karma and master your skills and get stronger and Park Go-chan won't be able to touch you."

"Thank you, so much."

She expressed her gratitude.

In the rising fire, her face is visible.

Looking closely, she is without makeup, but her bare face alone is pretty.

White and delicate skin. Her short, permed hair goes well with her slender face. Her height looks similar to Hyun-ji's at 165 cm (about 5 ft 4 inches), and her skinny legs in black training pants are impressionable.

'This is why Park Go-chan is drooling.'

Even after having his pride bent by Kang Chan-seong, Park Go-chan was still a roughneck. Riding on Kang Chan-seong's lack of interest in anything, he tactfully causes strife. Seeing his shamelessness, it is evident that he will continue to cause problems with Lee Hye-su.

'For now, I shall protect her.'

Kang Chan-seong is disinterested; Joon-ho is kind but weak, so that just leaves me. We are due to oppose each other anyway.

The tasty meat grilling smell spread around. Hye-su slowly rotating and grilling the whole rabbit was almost finished cooking.

"Is it all cooked through?"

"I think so."

"Then I'll cut it."

Hye-su took the entire rabbit out of the campfire. I used Sylph to cut the whole rabbit into five portions and shared it amongst everyone. Really, because we have no knife, I must rely on Sylph for even these trivial things.

The rabbit meat tasted decent. It was too hot, so it was uncomfortable to eat with bare hands, and no seasonings meant it was bland, but I didn't care since I was eating it on an empty stomach.

"Ah, this is so bland."

Park Go-chan is complaining. Then why not just starve to death?

"Hey asshole, go catch another one. Think this will be enough?"

Ah, I don't even want to share words. I take a piece of candy out of my pocket and throw it to Park Go-chan.

"Oh? What is this?"

"Can't you tell by looking at it?"

"Where did you get this! You can bring this kind of stuff here?"

"Originally, you can't. He said it was a special service?"

"That shit, I couldn't even bring my cigarettes and lighter, is he discriminating or what!"

But then, as soon as he popped the candy in his mouth, he shut up. I wonder if the price of shutting his mouth is a piece of candy.

I share the candy with everyone else.

"Thanks, hyung."

"Thank you."

Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su express their gratitude. Should I just escape in the night with these two?

Dinner is over and the night is deep.

"We need to decide on the sentry order."

Before going to bed, I mention it.

"What sentry crap."

This is, of course, Park Go-chan.

"We have to watch the fire and also watch out for the threat of an attack. I think we can each take turns for 1 hour 20 minutes. Would it be okay if I just decide the order?"

I purposely ask Kang Chan-seong. Kang Chan-seong nods his head. Thanks to him, Park Go-chan can't complain about it.

The sentry order is as follows.

Lee Hye-su, Lee Joon-ho, me, Kang Chan-seong, Park Go-chan. Putting Park-go Chan as the last sentry was a difficult, but fortuitous, decision I came to after much thought.

He may not wake up when being woken. That's why before him, I put Kang Chan-seong. If Kang Chan-seong wakes him, what is he going to do but wake up?

Also, there is concern that the next sentry will be called before the time is up. That's why he is last. This way he can't complain about the sentry problem.

First in line, Lee Hye-su stands guard at the front of the cave by the fire. The rest of us get ready for bed inside the cave. Most of us toss and turn because of how uncomfortable it is. I stuff the rabbit leather full of straw and make myself a pillow. The hunting and the filleting was done by me so this pillow is a privilege that I alone deserve.

Thanks to having dressed warmly, I was just barely able to withstand the cold air of the night.

And so I finished the first night of the second exam.



“Wake up”

The voice waking us was Kang Chan-seong.

“Ugg.”

I moan from the fatigue and wake from my sleep. I summon my board to check the time and it hasn't even been 40 minutes since I finished my guard.

“What is the matter?”

“The bastards are here.”

At those words I am fully awake. The others are surprised too and grab their weapons.

“Sylph, weapon, equip.”

Only after assuming battle stance do I ask Sylph.

“Sylph, are enemies nearby?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

“Do they look like monkeys and have red fur?”

-Meow.

This time too, Sylph nods her head.

“It really is those bastards.”

Park Go-chan grabs his sword tightly.

Sylph draws the number 21 in the dirt.

“21 of them?”

"There, there are that many!"

At the news of 21, Joon-ho freaks out, and Lee Hye-su's face goes white. Both her hands gripping the spear are shaking like aspen trees.

"Well, as long as we can guard the entrance of the cave. No matter the number, tell 'em to come."

Says Park Go-chan confidently. But then I refute.

"No. we have to guard the fire."

"What?"

"They're purposely attacking at night. That's because they're confident in the dark. They will probably first..."

I was about to say that they will go for the fire first.

"Kee-ek!" (like a shrieking noise)

"Kee-ek!"

The red apes send out shrieks from the forest and throw rocks. The rocks hit the fire and send out sparks and ash in all directions.

If the fire goes out, we will suddenly become disadvantaged!

I quickly take out a fistful of lead bullets and put one in the chamber.

"Sylph, please aim for me."

-Meow!

I put the butt of the gun to my shoulder and pull the trigger.

Toong-Puk!

"KKek!"

As the bullet was shot, the short cry of a red ape spread out from the inside of the forest. The neck, head, or heart will have been shot, because Sylph will have aimed it so.

I continue to quickly add lead bullets and shoot. I have Sylph, so I don't need to aim.

Toong-Puk!

“Kkek!”

Each time the magic gun shoots out a lead bullet, a cry comes from within the forest.

“Wow...”

Lee Joon-ho is in awe.

“How are you getting them when you can't even see them?”

Park Go-chan has on a face of disbelief.

I have killed six in mere moments.

“Kee-ekk!”

“Ggi-ekk!”

The angry yelling spread from inside the forest. Red apes wielding stone hatchets couldn't contain themselves and have come dashing out.

15 red apes come swarming like a wave.

“I'll help from the back!”

I yelled. As I did, the first person to jump out of the cave is Kang Chan-seong.

I thought he was going to step on them but as he heads forward, he spreads out his right hand.

Bbuk!

A single blow.

The red ape who got hit by the palm had his face turned 180 degrees. It was to the point I heard the sound of his neck break from where I was standing.

“Ggi-ekk!”

From the front, a different bastard swings his hatchet. The sight makes us twinge.

Bbuk!

The red ape attacked first but Kang Chan-seong's fist landed on the apes chin first. Kang Chan-seong again twists his body in the opposite direction and grabs another apes neck and legs and throws it. The thrown ape collides with other bastards.

‘What in the world!’

It was not thrown with strength. He collapsed his balance and used minimal strength to throw the ape. That is a Baguazhang martial artist.

He is really strong. It felt like Kang Chan-seong alone could defeat them all.

‘I can't just stand here and be a spectator’

After loading the gun, I pull the trigger.

Toong-puk!

From one of their heads, blood exploded like a fountain.

On top of the gun and also from watching Kang Chan-seong fight, the rest of the spectating group focus.

Lee Joon-ho cautiously moved forward with his shield and spear gripped.

“If I want karma, I have to fight!”

Park Go-chan screams out and races forward.

“Huk, huk...!”

Only Lee Hye-su was frozen in fear and unable to move.

The fight was quickly over.

I killed 9.

Lee Joon-ho fought hard, but finished with just injuring one or two, Park Go-chan zealously swung his sword, but compared to how uncontrollably he swung, he killed one and injured another.

The rest were nearly all Kang Chan-seong. He was nearly one blow, one kill, executed perfectly.

“Kek!”

“Keek!”

The remaining two apes run away in fear. I yell.

“Sylph! Cut their throats and kill them all!”

-Meow!

Sylph flies by like a shot. Their agonizing death howl emanates for a short while through the forest.

And thus, the fight ends in a big victory for us.

Chapter 17

Bloodshed (Part 1)

Now that the fight is over, the smell of blood was wafting everywhere. The heaps of red ape carcasses that was now laying around was oddly unreal.

In the first exam, killing just the one was enough for me. After barely managing to strangle its neck with a vine, I was in a shocked daze for a while.

But today, 11 of them died at my hands. It was much easier than it was in the first exam.

‘I’m supposed to become used to this shitty feeling? Do I look like that kind of person to you?’

“Yes, you do look like that kind of person.”

In the end, the baby angel was right. I’m a person capable of doing that and more. But there are those that seemingly are not.

“Oo-eck!” (Puking noise)

Lee Hye-su was gagging. Seeing her face smeared in tears, the sympathy floods over.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes... I’m sorry...”

She could barely hold in her crying to reply.

“Why wouldn’t she be okay? All she did was stand around in the back and spectate.”

The openly sarcastic Park Go-chan. Perhaps those words were hurtful enough because Lee Hye-su’s crying gets louder.

‘You didn’t really have a big part either, okay ajusshi?’

Park Go-chan's clear intentions make me hate him more.

Not just because he's a dick, but he continues to smother Lee Hye-su this way and suffocate her.

I will protect you but in turn, give me your body; to justify a kind of deal like that.

"This is big. In order to overcome a situation like this, I myself have to take up the courage and actively fight.'

Lee Hye-su was more useless than I thought, which worries me.

If she continues to be a burden this way, a place for her in the team will disappear. The gazes from the other team members, who see her as just a hindrance, continues to grow colder and eventually it may become just the situation that Park Go-chan wants.

"Hyung, do you think this was it?"

"No way." I shook my head. "If it was to end like this, they wouldn't have given us the mission to survive for a week."

"Anyway, it was like you said, the enemy to fight turned out to be the red apes."

"It's a good thing at least that it wasn't an enemy we didn't know. But..." I look around at the corpses strewn before the cave and sigh. "We cannot stay here anymore."

"Can't we just stay here? We can fight like we did today and endure for a week."

Perhaps. I am of the mind that we have to hurry and leave this place, but I guess I should ask for everyone's opinion.

I ask them all.

"I think we should leave before more of the bastards come, but what do you all think?"

"This place is safe."

Kang Chun-seong disagrees. It's an important matter so this guy is putting forth an opinion.

“If we fight in the forest, I can’t guarantee anything.”

That is true. This cave here has an expansive space in front of it and makes it easier to fight. But the forest is different.

There are too many things the bastards can hide behind and it’s not only left, right, front, back but they may attack from above from the trees. Such a 3-dimensional attack is much more beneficial to the bastards, who have numbers on their side.

“But staying in this place is just as dangerous.”

“And why is that?”

“First, I will point out the red apes’ intelligence. They not only set up an ambush attack, but they will also wait until nightfall to strike. They also have the decision making skill to go after the fire first.”

My explanation continues.

“In that case, instead of coming out and attacking us first, might they not surround the place and attack us when we go out to gather water or food?”

“...Indeed.”

Kang Chun-seong agrees.

At my opinion, everyone’s faces freeze in seriousness. It’s not a time to rejoice because we won one fight.

“But the fortunate aspect of this is that we killed them all and didn’t leave a single one. We have some time before they may attack again, so how about in that time we look for another base?”

“Okay.”

“Me too, hyung.”

“Me too...”

Kang Chun-seong, Joon-ho, Lee Hye-su all vote yes and lastly, Park Go-chan nods his

head too.

And so, we decide to leave the cave but before departing, I take off the three sets of underwear and socks, one by one.

I wrap them around the ends of the sticks we collected for firewood and put it in the fire.

Hwa leo leok – (swoosh)

'Oh ho ho, it works.'

I look at my makeshift torchlight and am proud of myself.

"Hyung, is this why your underwear and socks..."

"I wore three pairs."

Can you not treat me like I'm obviously going commando?

"Wow, hyung, your preparedness is really incredible. I hadn't thought that far at all."

The day was still dark, so I hold up my torchlight and lead the way.

"Sylph, can you find out if there is another cave nearby?"

-Meow

Sylph flits away. In a short while after searching the entirety of a 1.1 km diameter, Sylph shakes her head. Of course, caves probably aren't that common here.

Thankfully, the red apes are not within this perimeter.

"For now, we will have to walk. Earlier, the bastards tried to flee in that direction so we will go in the direction opposite that."

As I led the way, the group blindly follows. Perhaps it is due to my role in killing 11 of the apes that even Park Go-chan isn't hostile and has become compliant.

Somehow, it seems I have become the leader of the group. I didn't want to be in this

position, but the situation strangely became so. Kang Chun-seong was originally disinterested and Park Go-chan's inhospitable attitude naturally left the leadership role to me.

As we continued to walk, the sun began to rise. As the day grew brighter, I threw away the torchlight and continued to walk.

I did not forget to summon Sylph every 5 minutes and scout the area for 60 seconds.

According to Sylph's reconnaissance, there are plenty of herbivores like rabbits, deer, and monkeys within this forest.

"It seems there are a considerable number of the red apes here."

"Have they appeared?"

At Park Go-chan's question, I shake my head.

"We have been going through the forest since yesterday and we have only discovered herbivores. Compared to how plentiful the prey is here and, aside from snakes and owls, the only predators that remain are the red apes."

"This forest is their area."

Kang Chun-seong speaks up.

I nod my head.

"If indeed they use this space as their area, they will be a considerable group."

And there will definitely be a head to command them all.

That head may be, at this moment, looking on at his 21 dead comrades and consumed in rage.



"Ki-aaaaak-!"

It is a roar of anger.

The red apes are in fear in concert and cringe.

A physique up to 2 meters. Fur as red as blood.

The outward appearance brags an overwhelming majesty and its owner is full of wrath.

There is a type of red ape called Rode. Every generation there are but one or two that are born with this mutation and they are twice as big and strong as the average type. They have no choice but to be destined to be the leader.

But of course, to get there, they have their own trials they must face.

The current leader had to go through them too.

The red ape, Rode, appeared no different than the average type at birth, but as time went on, the characteristics of the special type start to show.

The existing leader had expressed strong hostility towards his potential competition. Because of this, before the young one was trampled, he had to flee.

Separated from the group, Rode survived alone in the forest through a bitter adolescence.

Then one day, Rode realized he himself had grown as big as the leader and returned to the group. The leader he met was not scary the way he had been when Rode was younger.

He challenged, and he won.

From then to now, it was an omnipotent rule.

Another special type was born, grew and challenged, but Rode won. After defeating two challengers and preserving his seat as leader, Rode emerged as the strongest ruler there ever was.

And this Rode was in a full rage.

“Ki-aaaaak-!”

Hundreds of red apes shivered in horror. There were plenty of beasts of prey and monsters that flowed into this rich forest. And every time, Rode eradicated them. Leading the pack and at times, using his own strength, he showed the majesty of being a leader.

Their area continued to grow and, without precedent, they reproduced to great numbers. And then from this forest, their breed began to die.

An enemy had come into their domain and so he had sent his subordinates.

But the time had passed and without any word or news, he came out himself and his subordinates were but corpses. And it happened on their own land.

It cannot be forgiven.

He must punish those who ignore his authority.

“Ki-eeeeeek!” Rode gives out an order.

“Ki-eek!”

“Ggi-ek!”

“Ki-eeek!”

Hundreds of red apes barked and growled their agreement.

Revenge for blood!

The bloodbath to protect their group’s domain was about to begin.



We followed the flow of the small river and walked. On account of not having a canteen, I felt it was a good idea to stay close to water. The river had plenty of large fish and so it was easy to get food too. Using Sylph, rabbit hunting is easy, but prepping and cooking a fish is even easier.

Using a wooden stick, I shaved it sharp to create a simple knife, and using this, Lee Hye-su prepped and cooked the fish. Per my suggestion, she was trying to take care of

the small things.

In the fight the previous night, she was a burden and she must have been aware of it. If she doesn't help even with things like this, she won't receive any karma and will continue to be of no use.

'Anyway, it's weird.'

Observing from yesterday and today, her body physique doesn't look any different to me than the average woman. It was obvious when she trying not to show that she was tired and her feet were hurting from the walking.

'Didn't she say she got the entry level 1 physical strength buff?'

I heard that the entry level 1 physical strength buff was the level of a healthy adult male. It means it's better than my crappy health condition.

Sylph and I started a fire and she grilled the fish and handed it out to everyone. As soon as the cooking was done, I quickly put out the fire. It's possible our location can be given away from the rising smoke.

"If you're all done eating, let's go. We have to get rid of the smell on our bodies so please don't forget to wash as well."

"Ugh, how annoying."

Park Go-chan is mumbling and washing his hands in the brook. The rest of the group follows my words obediently.

The biggest reason for following the brook is this.

If we follow the flowing water, I'm hoping our body scent might dissipate a little bit.

Normally, carnivores have an acute sense of smell and I think the red ape is no different. It uses tools and has intelligence, but they do look closer to beast than to humans.

As we begin to move, I summon Sylph and send her out to scout.

Like her namesake, she flies away like the wind and returns after scouting and very

much unlike her, she isn't being aegyo* and instead, screams.

-MEOOW!

"Is there something wrong?"

Sylph draws a number in the dirt.

"293 meters?"

-Meow!

Sylph shakes her head. Then do you mean...

"293 of them?"

-Meow!

Sylph is nodding her head.

"What is she saying? There's 300?!" Park Go-chan freaks out.

"Maybe she means something d-different? Like a group of ants or mice..." Joon-ho asks in disbelief and I ask Sylph to be sure.

"There are 293 red apes?"

-Meow!

"Where are they?"

Sylph spins round and round. I couldn't tell what that means and I ponder for a while. As Sylph spun around us in circles, I finally understood.

"All around us?"

-Meow!

"Have they surrounded us?"

Sylph is shaking her head.

“So they are dispersed and searching through the forest for us?”

-Meow!

After the fight last night, we had briskly escaped. But the bastards are already all around us!

“Hey you shit, what’s going on! You said we had some time before they came again!” Park Go-chan gets angry at me.

Why are you asking me?

The answer is simple!

They’re moving faster than we are.

—

Turns out his name is actually Kang Chun-seong, not Kang Chan-seong. I’ll have his name as Chun from now on.

Chapter 18

Bloodshed (Part 2)

“It’s probably because while we were walking, they were running.”

“You bitch, this is all because of you, you maggot!”

“What, what did I...!”

Park Go-chan is threatening Lee Hye-su again. That behavior in this situation, it seems to have become a habit.

I come between the two of them and speak.

“Now is not the time for this, we have to keep moving. Thankfully, the bastards haven’t found out exactly where we are. That’s why they’re dispersed and are flipping through this whole forest.”

“Hyung, then what do we do?”

Joon-ho’s voice is shaking. Why do you keep asking me? I’m going crazy too!

I can barely hold my shaking heart and speak.

“We have to move a bit faster. We have to move carefully so as not to run into them, and when we have no choice, we have to make our way by fighting through them.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to find a scary spot and just hide out in it?”

I shake my head at Park Go-chan’s question.

“Our traces will soon be picked up. From that point on, they will know where we move so before that happens, we have to burst through those that are surrounding us.”

“Our trace will be picked up? Hey, you, with what proof...”

“We grilled a fish earlier!”

“...!”

Park Go-chan instantly shuts up.

Did you think the red apes wouldn't be able to pick up on the scent of a fire and a grilled fish?

It's only a matter of time. When it is found, the scattered apes in the area will all head in our direction. Before then, we have to make it to a safe place.

“Sylph, show us the direction where the bastards aren't.”

-Meow.

Sylph points with her front paw slightly left and ahead.

“Let's go!”

At my words, the group begins to walk. Being in a tight situation, the groups walking is faster than it was before.

As our movement grew faster, it became obvious that it was growing difficult for her. But she looked like she was gritting her teeth and trying really hard to keep up. I think she is even more aware of everyone's gaze because she was insulted by Park Go-chan earlier.

Because others may notice, I can't even ask her if she is okay. Stepping on eggshells even amongst comrades... this doesn't bode well.

No matter, that is a problem to be solved later. For now, we have to escape the current danger.

During our moving, I had un-summoned and repeatedly summoned Sylph in anticipation of a fight, but it was difficult keeping tracking and adjusting the summoning times. I was nervous whether I was un-summoning or summoning Sylph.

We were changing our direction accordingly and moving however Sylph told us to.

For an hour, we carefully avoided running into a red ape. And during that time, the red apes were narrowing down their field.

'Well, this is practically their front lawn.'

As their search field got narrower, it became impossible to avoid the situation.

-Meow!

The once again summoned Sylph came back from scouting and told us the red apes' location.

Ahead 312 meters, 25 red apes.

"It looks like we'll have to fight."

Our group summons its weapons and prepares to fight. Gripping a spear in each hand, Lee Hye-su worries me the most.

"Joon-ho. Protect her."

"Yes, hyung."

Kang Chun-seong will act alone in the front, Joon-ho and Park Go-chan will protect Lee Hye-su and work together to guard. I will be in the back and shooting. This is what I conceive in my head.

With our nervous tension we head forward.

"Sylph, tell me when they are within 55 meters."

-Meow

The max distance on my magic rifle is 60 meters. I am thinking that I will strike first and shoot. As we forged ahead, the group begins to walk slower. Then...

-Meow!

Sylph sends me the signal.

I take out a fistful of bullets from the bag. I put one in the chamber, aim ahead, and pull the trigger.

The moment I shoot, Sylph adjusts the gun with her front paw.

Toong!

From afar, I can hear the cry of one of them.

“Ki-eek!”

“Ki-ik!”

In their surprise, the red apes are flustered.

I shift my feet and continue to shoot. There is no need to worry about my stance. If I shoot, Sylph aims for me.

Tong!

“Kek!”

Every time I shoot, I can hear a cry.

2 shots, 3 shots, 4 shots...

When I have shot and killed 5, the red apes get our location and come hurdling at us.

“Ha-!”

From our side, Kang Chun-seong runs forward, straight towards them.

Joon-ho and Park Go-chan do not dare copy it and instead, stay planted where they are and guard.

I continue to shoot and kill another 2.

Toong!

“Kik!”

Toong-puk!

With every recoil from the heavy rifle, another ape's head or neck explodes, and the sight no longer feels so terrible.

The encounter begins.

Heading for Kang Chun-seong, the red apes come at him from the front and left and right. At that moment.

Puh puh puh puk!

Kang Chun-seong's two fists almost move faster than the eyes can see. The red apes get punched and get flung. Such incredible power! This must be the aura control.

But then in that instant, a bastard falls down from the tree above and lands on Kang Chun-seong.

“Danger...!”

The second I try to warn him, Kang Chun-seong reflexively reacts. Gripping the ground with one hand and doing a handstand, he kicks the ape in the head!

Bbagak!

“Ki ekk!”

The neck gets twisted and the red ape dies instantly in midair.

The moment he tries to regain his stance, more red apes pile on him.

Kang Chun-seong is lying flat on the ground when he grabs an apes legs and knocks it to the ground, using two feet to kick it in its core and fling it. The flung red ape collides with the others and they fall to the ground.

He flicks up his body in a single breath and Kang Chun-seong again showers punches and is a big success. I'm not sure if he is a person, but he is invincible.

The bastards decide Kang Chun-seong is too much to handle.

They avoid Kang Chun-seong and head straight for us.

"They're, they're coming!"

Joon-ho gets tense and holds up his shield.

"Fuck, come at me!"

He yells in a strong voice, but Park Go-chan stumbles backwards.

"Hu hu huk...!"

With a spear in each hand flailing aimlessly, Lee Hye-su lets out a cry.

'Damn!'

As the bastards came just a stone's throw away my heart felt rushed.

The method of putting a lead bullet in the chamber and manually loading a gun has never felt so inconvenient.

Toong – puk!

One bastard dies as his head explodes.

I load and aim the gun, shoot.

Toong – pak!

"Kek!"

It hit it in the heart and fell backwards, spewing blood.

Park Go-chan and Joon-ho were quickly surrounded by red apes and had to put up a cutthroat fight.

Joon-ho was somewhat holding his ground with his shield but Park Go-chan was clumsily swishing his sword around and looked to be in a predicament. From behind them, Lee Hye-su pretended to stab with her spear, but it was no help at all.

“Sylph! Cut their throats!”

-Meow!

Flying like the wind, Sylph slit three of their throats at once.

“Ki eek!”

One of them headed in my direction with its pickax.

“Kuk!”

In my alarm, I walk backwards. Because I was being attacked in such close quarters I didn't have a moment to reload the gun. As a red ape came at me from the front and the back, I quickly call out.

“Sylph!”

-Meow!

Sylph returns to me and cuts with the wind.

Chwak, chwak, chwak – (swish, swish, swish)

The three red apes let out a fall of blood from their necks.

I barely escaped danger, but there isn't a moment to breathe.

“Gyaak!”

Lee Hye-su has been attacked and fallen over.

“Miss Hye-su!”

In my haste, I run to her and hit the red ape with the butt of my rifle.

Bbuk!

“Ki ek!”

I hit it in the face and the red ape stumbles about.

The bastards continue to come at us from all direction. There is no time at all to load the gun!

“Get out of here, fuck!”

I yell out as I crazily swing the butt of my rifle around.

Puk!

“Aak!”

I thought I had avoided it, but a bastard has threw a rock and hit me in the left shoulder. Thank goodness I wasn’t hit in the head.

“This won’t do!”

I take Lee Hye-su into my arms, who is still laying on the ground.

“Sylph! Lift us up!”

-Meow!

A sudden surge of wind. Caught up in the strong gust, Lee Hye-su and I are taken up towards the sky.

“Gyaak!”

Out of fright, Lee Hye-su screams.

“On top of the tree!”

Per my instruction, Sylph lands on a large tree right next to us.

“Hold on tight!”

After yelling at Lee Hye-su, I quickly load a lead bullet. Done!

I aim and shoot at the red ape attacking Joon-ho and Park Go-chan.

Toong – puk!

The crown of its head explodes, killing the red ape.

I continue to efficiently load and pull the trigger.

One ape, two apes!

When I have shot three, a couple of them begin to climb up the tree. Indeed, like their monkey appearance, they are extremely good at climbing.

“Miss Hye-su! Block the bastards! Just stab them with the spears!”

“Aaaak!”

In her panic, Lee Hye-su starts screaming and randomly stabbing with her spear.

The apes that were climbing are surprised and halt for a moment, then move over to a different branch and continue to come toward us.

In that time, I finish loading the gun and shoot at one.

Toong – puk!

“Ki ekk!”

The thing falls to the ground spewing blood from its neck.

But another two are attacking us. There is no time to reload.

I pull Lee Hye-su to me again.

“Sylph! Catch us!”

Lee Hye-su and I jump from the tree. When we land, the power of the wind gently sets us on the ground. After safely landing, I put down Lee Hye-su and once again fling around the butt of my rifle.

“Uh ak!”

I hear Joon-ho scream.

I'm surprised and look behind me to see that Joon-ho has lost his spear and is walking backwards. Blood was coming down his forehead. It seems he was hit in the head from a thrown rock.

"Sylph, wind knife!"

That second, Sylph threw her wind knife around everywhere

Chwak chwak chwak chwak - ! (swish swish swish swish)

"Kek!"

"Kuh ek!"

"Ki ik!"

In an instant the three apes that had been attack us are on the ground.

With perfect timing, Kang Chun-seong, who had been active alone on the frontline, returns to us to help.

As Kang Chun-seong joined us, the remaining red apes didn't easily attack us and hesitated.

'Now's the chance!'

I load the chamber and pull the trigger.

Toong - puk!

One bastard falls and dies.

The remaining red apes number just 4 beasts.

"Ki eeeek!"

"Ki eek!"

The bastards begin to run away in fright.

I feel reassured and the thought of shooting them in the back of their heads doesn't even enter my mind.

The exhausted Joon-ho collapses, sitting on the floor, and Park Go-chan tries to catch his breath. Lee Hye-su looked like her soul has left her body and just blankly stares into space.

The only one keeping their cool was Kang Chun-seong whose two fists and body were drenched in blood. It is probably red apes' blood.

Hold on, how much of Sylph's power did I use?

"Board Retrieval. Skill Review."

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 24 minutes)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

'Just 24 minutes!'

I feel my heart drop to the floor.

Then again, I did use a lot of wind knives and went up and back down a tree using Sylph's power.

Anyway, if a fight happens in this situation, the odds are unfavorable.

"There isn't much summoning time left for Sylph. We have to hurry up and go!"

The bastards that escaped will return to their group.

We have to move without a moment to rest. We set off, nearly running.

From within the forest, here and there, scary yelling noises emanated. It was like they were signaling to each other that our location has been found.

At these sounds we ran, panting.

Suddenly I thought, perhaps this here is hell.

Chapter 19

From within the darkness (1)

It was a time like hell.

Summoning and un-summoning Sylph repeatedly, I ran, gasping for air. Compared to Kang Chun-seong and Joon-ho with his physical strength buff, my stamina was even worse than Park Go-chan's. But there was another who was gasping for air more than me, and that's Lee Hye-su.

She looked like the very breath would leave her and her face was strewn in tears.

On her severely fatigued and frightened face, her fear that her comrades may leave her behind was obvious.

I wanted to help her but I was barely keeping up as it was.

“Get on my back.”

Out of the ordinary, Kang Chun-seong interfered. Even with Lee Hye-su on his back he ran, leading the group.

As that happened, the person in last place became me.

“Hak, hak, haak...!”

It felt like my heart would explode. It was to the point that I feared I would die running like this.

I kept going back and forth between hoping we have a battle or to just keep running.

-Meow!

Sylph's meow, with only 5 minutes left of her summon time, brought my dimming consciousness back to focus.

“Ah.....!”

I am in awe at the view before me. The flow of the small river is joined to a small waterfall. Below the waterfall was a gorge surrounded with rocks and inside it, slightly hidden by the waterfall, was a small cave.

“H-here...”

I was so out of breath the words didn't properly come out of my mouth.

“You're saying we should rest here, right?”

With his physical strength buff entry level 2, Joon-ho who was in better condition than I, asked me.

I nod my head.

We make our way down to the gorge. We go into the small cave behind the falling waterfall. It was small enough that as 5 people entered, it made us feel crowded.

But, perhaps due to the waterfall that blocked the entrance, it felt safe.

‘Thank goodness. If we fight here, it will be easier to block them.’

The waterfall will get rid of our body odor and stop it from going outside.

The passage through the gorge is narrow so even if they attack, the fight will be easier.

I un-summon Sylph and speak to the group.

“Let's spend the day here.”

The group nods.

I make my gun and bullet pouch disappear and collapse onto the floor. Maybe it is just because of how tired I am, but as soon as I lay down, sleep floods over me.



When I come to, it is pitch black.

It is so dark I cannot see anything. All I hear is the soft breathing of my group.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could make out the interior of the cave.

What immediately catches my eye is Kang Chun-seong, sitting towards the entrance to the cave.

“You didn’t sleep?”

Kang Chun-seong barely glances at me and nods his head. It seems while everyone had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion, he had kept watch all alone.

I summon my board to check the time.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive until the time

-Time limit: 5 days 9 hours 14 minutes

“You should go to bed now. We will keep sentry now.”

At the words, Kang Chun-seong immediately laid down and fell asleep.

“Sylph.”

-Meow.

“Shh, quietly.”

Sylph nods her head and rubs her face on me. At her adorableness, I feel my heart melting.

"Scout for me please."

Sylph nods and flies out the cave.

She returns in a moment and draws a number in the ground. It is so dark I cannot really see.

"Can you draw it on my hand?"

Sylph draws a number into my right hand. Along with a tickle, I can make out the number 271.

"271 of them?"

Sylph nods her head.

All of the red apes, minus the ones we had killed during the day, are gathering outside and near to us. They are sure that we are somewhere nearby.

'This situation is really not good.'

This place we had thought to be safe was actually not that good of a spot.

The falling waterfall is blocking the entrance so we cannot build a fire and because it is cold and moist, it is uncomfortable to sleep in. We cannot survive for five days in here.

We must escape this place.

But with what ability will we pierce through a net of 271 apes?

'It's making me depressed, so I'm going to stop thinking about it for now.'

A while later, I wake the group, minus Kang Chun-seong, and decide on our sentry order. Between the four of us, we decide to each take turns of 1 hour 30 minutes.



“Get up, guy.”

Thanks to Park Go-chan tapping me with his feet, I’m awoken from my sleep.

“Man, fuck, it’s so cold how am I going to get a proper sleep.”

Park Go-chan finishes his sentry duty and lays down mumbling. Complaining aside, he quickly starts to snore.

I spaced out for a good while and then kicked my sleepiness aside and summoned Sylph.

“Can you go see what the red apes are doing?”

-Meow.

She replied in a small voice and flies out.

Sylph returns in a moment and I ask her.

“Are the bastards sleeping?”

-Meow.

Sylph is nodding her head.

They have good night vision but they aren’t nocturnal. That means last night’s attack was a strategy.

“Are they all sleeping? If not, how many of them are awake?”

Sylph draws a ticklish number 9 on my palm.

‘Just 9?’

There are hundreds roaming about and there are only 9 that are awake and keeping watch? It’s more pathetic than I thought.

But I can understand it. There are hundreds of them and this forest is their territory. They have never had to fear and so their watch is loose.

'Should I use that to my advantage?'

I think about escaping with my group while the bastards are asleep.

But that is indeed reckless.

No matter how pathetic, there is the chance that we will be caught by the 9 that are keeping watch. In addition, we are exhausted. Even if we break through their ranks, we won't be able to keep running while they chase us.

'How did it come to this?'

I had thought things were going well and according to plan.

As we arrived in the forest, I had deduced that our enemy was the red ape. I had success in getting water and food. We were also ready for their night attack. Isn't this much pretty good?

But alas, in the end, we are locked in this tiny gorge.

'The red apes' teamwork surpasses my expectations.'

We killed all 21 of the apes that had ambushed us in the night attack, and didn't leave a single one able to return.

But after that, and not even within a full day, hundreds of them worked together to search the entire forest.

They quickly narrowed their search and eventually found our location.

We did break through the earlier search team, but in the end we have found ourselves in a corner.

'This is a total mall hunt.*'

The red apes' group efforts were thoroughly organized and close.

The number that died at our hands is well over 40 and they weren't a bit shaken up.

I am sure of it that they have a strong leader that has strong control of the group. A smart leader that knows how to night attack and mall hunt.

Let's organize this.

First, a smart and strong leader.

Second, that leader has 271 red apes acting as his hands and feet.

Third, this forest is no different than their front lawn.

Fourth, in our group, one is a trouble maker and the other is incompetent.

'What kind of bullshit exam is this?'

It's making me angry. That bbundegi angel bastard! He may be looking at my anguish now and chuckling right now.

"Board retrieval."

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive the time limit

-Time limit: 5 days 3 hours 45 minutes

I stare blankly at the words on my board. I spent a good deal of time just staring at the board.

And suddenly, a thought popped into my head.

Survive until the time limit.

That is all. Now that I think of it, nowhere did it say to flee for a week. Just survive.

It wasn't an impossible mission. Like the first exam, they have given us a mission that is doable. Something that is possible with our skills.

Our skills.

My skill...

And then something passed by in my head, like a flash of light. I summon Sylph again.

"Sylph. I have something to ask you."

-Meow?

Cute Sylph, looking at me with her round eyes.

"Using your power, can you make it so sound disappears?"

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

"Can you get rid of smell?"

-Meow.

She nods again.

"Then lastly, do you know what kind of bastard the leader of the red apes is? Like his appearance or if he's giving out orders to other bastards. Maybe, have you seen him?"

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head this time too.

Ah.....

This is it. The answer was this close all along.



I wake up the next sentry, Lee Hye-su.

“Is it my turn?”

“Something has come up so I am waking you early.”

“What happened?”

“If I do not return within the hour, wake the others and escape.”

“What?”

“I will return.”

I head out the cave.

But Lee Hye-su follows after me.

“Where are you going!”

“I’m going to kill their leader. If I can do just that, the exam is clear.”

“And if you do not return?”

“If an hour passes and I am not back, escape before the day brightens. For now, the bastard’s watch is loose so you have a chance, but if I fail, they will be more vigilant and even in the night they will watch more closely. So you...”

“That’s not it!”

“...?”

“What about me.....”

Lee Hye-su is about to cry.

“What I was about to be molested, you helped me, you saved me during the fight, and you’ve taken care of me this and that way... Hyun-ho, you are the only one that has

protected me. If you are not here, what will I do.”

At those words, my heart is deafened.

“Please do not go. Just stay here. Why do you have to submit to such danger?”

I let out a bitter smile.

“Would you like to talk for a while?”

We sit together on a boulder.

I ask “How old are you?”

“I’m 27.”

“How long have you been with a company?”

“This year marks 4 years.”

“Did you get hired as soon as you graduated?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of company is it?”

“I worked at the ST Soft marketing division.”

“Wow, you got into a big company right after graduating. You must’ve attended a good university.”

“The school wasn’t bad, but my dad is a ST Soft board member.”

“Wow, I’m so jealous. Your face is pretty and your house is well off, you had a very successful life.”

“It’s not so. Look at me now...”

“Better than me.” I speak up.

“Even if I say the name, people don’t know the university I went to and up to now, I’ve been saying that I’m studying for the civil servant exam and living as an unemployed person.”

“...”

“My college friends graduated and mailed off hundreds of resumes, and then the place they barely got hired at gives them a salary shy of \$20,000. Seeing that scared me. That I might face those hardships too. So I decided to be a civil servant and wasted my life until I was 29.”

I let out a deep sigh and continue.

“I have never been complimented for being good at anything. I never worked hard for anything and my life ended having lived just plain and mediocre. That’s why I’m working so desperately now. Because I want to live. So that if I am given another chance, that I might live my life properly. I’m pretty pitiful, huh?”

“N-no, you aren’t. You are really incredible, Hyun-ho. If it wasn’t for you, we would all be dead by now.”

“Thank you. For the first time in my life, I’ve gotten a compliment.”

I laugh and she laughs too.

Chapter 20

Within the Darkness (Part 2)

“Do you remember the first day when Park Go-Chan and Kang Chun-seong almost fought?”

“How could I forget.”

“Do you remember what Kang Chun-seong said back then?”

“Oh, the eyeball...”

I laugh and nod my head.

“Yes, that. He said it’s something anyone can do but not everyone has the nerve to do.”

“Yes.”

“Hye-su, you will eventually have to do it too. You cannot be protected forever.”

“...”

“I know it is scary. I was terrified too. I still am. But try and cross that mountain. Once you cross it, you will be better than anyone else. Hye-su, you are capable of it.”

I stand up from my seat. I can’t delay the time any longer.

“I will be off now.”

“Ah....!”

Lee Hye-su stood up quickly and tried to dissuade me, but I marched on forward. And so I set off for the gorge.

As I left the gorge and entered the forest, I put on my bullet pouch and rifle, and summoned Sylph.

"From now on, get rid of all the noise I make."

-Meow.

I take a step.

Interestingly, the crunchy sound of stepping on grass was not made.

'Nice.'

With this, I can easily avoid the 9 apes standing guard.

"Guide me to where the leader is. Avoiding the awake apes as much as possible."

-Meow.

Sylph signaled she understood and hopped onto my shoulder, pointing the way with her paw. I walked in the direction my cute guide instructed me to.

I retrieved my board and checked on Sylph's remaining summon time in real time.

Getting rid of any noise was using her time twice as fast. The bigger a noise I make, the more power is used to get rid of that noise.

When I walk as softly as possible, the time given to me is about an hour. And so that is why I told her to escape if I was not back within the hour.

'They will have a hard time without me. Plain as day.'

Not to mention food, but even with starting a fire they will suffer. I think to myself that when that time comes, even Park Go-Chan will long for me and it suddenly makes me laugh.

And Lee Hye-su.

'You are the only one that has protected me.'

That I appeared righteous and brave to one woman makes me proud.

Of course in her shoes, my help was crucial to her survival.

But I don't think she calculated for that and used me. If she was a calculating women, wouldn't she have flirted with me from the get go?

Seeing as how she didn't, Lee Hye-su is just a nice girl who grew up in a nice house, not wanting for anything.

Honestly, I liked her the moment I saw her, her pretty face, void of any primping. It's why I disliked Park Go-Chan even more. Taking care of her wasn't completely empty of an ulterior motive for me.

My insides boil at the thought that with me gone, Park Go-Chan may sexually harass her as he pleases.

'You think I'm doing some heroic sacrifice? I just want to go back to living.'

If I succeed in this task, I will have made the biggest contribution to clearing this exam and will earn a lot of karma. Not to mention it will make me more appealing to Lee Hye-su.

It is this double motivation that keeps me forging on.

Of course, the most important thing is my life.

I move carefully.

Not long after entering the forest, I can see the red apes. They were bunched together sleeping, here and there.

With Sylph's, help I weaved through the sleeping bastards and passed them.

My skin shivers, having to go right past the sleeping bastards. I feel my heart getting tense. If I take one wrong step and step on one, it's the end for me.

Then, Sylph taps me on the shoulder.

'What is it?'

As I look at her, she points to the left. From the left, an awake red ape is strolling about.

I immediately lower my body and carefully move. I hide my body behind the bushes

and continue on.

Sylph draws on my shoulder with her front paw.

There is 50 meters left until the leader.

40, 30, 20.....

The distance gets shorter.

At 15 meters, I put a lead bullet in the chamber. Using Sylph to quietly slit its throat is the best option but you never know, so I keep the gun loaded.

Then, 9 meters.

Hiding behind a thick tree, I look at the situation before me.

'Is it that?'

The red apes' leader is a bastard with an incredible build. His height looks similar to Kang Chun-seong, and its muscles are intense. He looks to be about three times as heavy as the other apes.

'I wonder if he's a mutated one?'

If it's this much, he must've been destined to be the leader since the day he was born. Superior since birth, he must have a strong hold on the gang.

Nonetheless, all that's left to do is kill it.

Like a strong being, he sleeps in a big starfish shape, with all limbs out. He appears magnanimous in his sleep. I will let you sleep for eternity.

As far as obstacles go, near him are two red apes that are wide awake.

Leader, 2 guards.

I have to kill all three at once.

"Sylph, do you think you can slit all three of their throats at the same time?"

Sylph nods her head up and down.

"Okay. Slit them."

-Meow.

She flew like the wind.

Chwak! Chwak! Kwajik-!

From all three of their necks, blood pour like a fountain.

'It's done!'

I gripped my fists and celebrated. I just have to quietly escape the way I came, but...

"Ki ruh ruhk!"

"Huh?"

I'm completely surprised.

The red ape leader bastard makes a sound like he's coughing up phlegm from his blood pouring neck and wakes up. He hasn't died?

The leader presses down on his blood gushing neck and gets up. His body is stumbling back and forth dangerously.

"Sylph, kill!"

I give out the order to Sylph.

But then, right at that moment.

"Ki eeeeeek-!"

The leader rips out a roar. At the same time, the blood goes 'pu hak!' and, as if exploding, pours out his neck. He falls backwards and stops breathing.

But the last roar he let out has already awoken all the red apes.

“Ki ek!”

“Ggi ek?”

“Ggi ik!”

From all around, the agitated voices of the red apes.

‘Aww shit!’

To have his throat cut and still let out a roar and wake everyone up! What the hell?

Now I am in the center of a hundred woken red apes.

“Board retrieval, skill review!”

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 31 minutes.)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

I only have 31 minutes of summon left.

‘What do I do now?’

My heart is pounding in horror. Amidst the danger, I desperately search my mind. A countermeasure, countermeasure, countermeasure!

‘Fuck, there is none! Just run!’

I start to run. Using Sylphs power, I run without a sound, quietly.

The bastards aren’t completely awake from their slumber, and haven’t realized the situation. The leader is dead and without anyone giving orders, they are bound to be muddled in confusion.

Using this time to run at full speed is the best option for right now.

“Ki ek!”

One bastard is face on in front of me.

‘Fuck, what are you looking at.’

I give him a pull of my loaded magic gun.

Puk!

Thanks to Sylph’s power, the gun doesn’t make a sound, and the only sound that is made is the dull thud when the lead bullet hits its skull.

As I run I load the gun again.

“Move!”



As the strange shrieks of the red apes spread through the forest, Lee Hye-su is in a sheer fright.

‘What do I do?’

It seems the red apes have all woken up at once. If Kim Hyun-ho hadn’t been caught, there wouldn’t be such a disturbance.

...Kim Hyun-ho will probably not be returning alive.

In a daze and not knowing what to do, Lee Hye-su suddenly remembers what Kim Hyun-ho had told her.

“Board retrieval.”

Retrieving the board and checking the time, almost an hour has passed. She heads inside the cave and wakes the rest of the group.

“What is it?”

“That, that is...”

At Joon-ho’s question, she doesn’t know how to respond and stumbles in her words.

“Hyu-Hyun-ho told us to immediately escape.”

“What?”

“What are you talking about?”

As Park Go-Chan asked of her, Lee Hye-su replied with a voice mixed into a cry.

“I think Hyun-ho is dead.”

She can barely relay the whole story to the shocked group.

“That shithole, who does he think he is to go out all alone and fuck himself, pfft, I didn’t like him from the beginning anyway.”

“Now is not the time to be saying things like that. Don’t you think we should hurry and escape?”

At Joon-ho’s words, Park Go-Chan waves his hand.

“In that big a commotion, going out will be more dangerous.”

“But, Hyun-ho hyung...”

“Hey, shit. You wanna talk back to me again?”

Park Go-Chan is eager to assume leadership and Joon-ho quickly shuts his mouth.

The group cannot come to a decision and stays flustered. Now that Kim Hyun-ho, who had made a practical leader, has disappeared, problems are already surfacing.

“Let’s go.”

It is Kang Chun-seong who had quietly been in silence, without a word.

“He said to run if he didn’t come back within the hour. So we shall run.”

Kang Chun-seong thought it wise to follow Kim Hyun-ho’s request. Since it was Kim Hyun-ho’s good decision making that led them well to this point.

Park Go-Chan didn't make a squeak and followed. And so they group left the gorge.

"Where should we go?" Asks Joon-ho.

Everyone is in silence.

Not that they think about it, the one who had decided where to go was always Kim Hyun-ho. Which direction should we go if we want to live? The person leading the way has to make those decisions constantly.

They realize the big difference in being in the front and just following in that footstep.

"Missus, in what direction did that bastard Kim Hyun-ho go?"

Park Go-Chan asks and Lee Hye-su points to the right.

"Then we should go in the opposite direction!"

Park Go-Chan shifts his walking to the left. The other three people don't have any other thoughts and so have no choice but to follow him.

Following from way in the back, Lee Hye-su felt an ominous foreboding.

Park Go-Chan decided the direction they should go, and the group decided to follow it. Park Go-chan's desire for leadership that Kim Hyun-ho had pressed down, is starting to come up again.

And Kang Chun-seong, who has the ability to suppress him, has no desire to assert his own leadership. It seems he doesn't want to deal with other people.

And Lee Joon-ho was weak, in strength and heart.

'Hyun-ho, please come back alive. Please don't die.'

Lee Hye-su pleaded in her heart over and over.



Perhaps the focal point was the death of their leader, because the red apes did not chase after me.

Thanks to that I barely escaped alive but I cannot return to the gorge where the group is. It's because I cannot divulge their location because of me.

"Sylph, the bastards aren't chasing me anymore, right?"

-Meow.

Sylph was on my shoulder waving her tail back and forth, and replied. Now, Sylphs summon time is only 5 minutes left. It is fortuitous I was able to escape in that time.

"It's done..."

Breathing a sigh of relief, I look up at the sky.

It is still the dark night sky. But a ray of sunlight peeked through, calling on the morning.

"It's done! I did it, ku hahaha!"

I make two fists and rejoice.

When I think to myself, I cannot believe it. I secretly went in on my own, amidst hundreds of red apes, and killed their leader and escaped.

I did it!

The unemployed, almost 30-year-old, Kim Hyun-ho!

Chapter 21

Murder (Part 1)

Now that their leader is dead, I wonder if they might now back off now.

Humans and animals, when they come into a group setting, they fight for power, and now that the leader is dead, they will probably pick a successor first. But that is no cause to relax, even for a moment.

'If there was a second in command within the group, they may be able to organize the chaos really quickly. He may quickly become the new leader and chase us.'

Not settling for a hierarchy, but to demonstrate his strength, the second in command, who is placed in leadership, may hunt us down, this possibility is high.

Anyway, for now what is left is to rejoin the group.

'Oh shoot. Now that I think of it, they should all be escaping now?'

I had said to run if I wasn't back within the hour.

At the time, maybe it was because I was in front of a woman, but I felt like a hero, like a die-hard protagonist, and with that mentality in mind, had told her to run. Now that the time is here, I'm regretting it. I should have just told her to wait for me!

I finish resting and get up and go.

I did not forget to summon Sylph every five minutes as a guide and scout.

At the end of carefully running back, I arrive at the gorge with the waterfall.

"Sylph, the people?"

-Meow.

Sylph shakes her head.

"Then let's see where they went by looking for footprints or something."

At my order, Sylph quickly flew away and promptly returned, and with an adorable front paw, pointed to the left.

"Okay."

From my end I have Sylph, so I should be able to catch up quickly.

They may all think I'm dead, I wonder what reaction they will have when they see me. Never mind, I also want to brag about my achievement in having killed the ape leader too.

If I use this opportunity well, there might be a something-something with Lee Hye-su too. The atmosphere last night was alright, wasn't it? Haha.

I walk in with a spring in my step.



Lee Hye-su's foreboding was correct.

The new leader, Park Go-chan, was slowly letting his anger go rampant and unchecked.

"Keep up, faster, faster! We're not on a picnic, stupid bitch!"

Amidst the violent swearing, Lee Hye-su couldn't get in a word and just diligently walked on.

In the aftermath of yesterday, she has blisters on her feet. The tennis shoes she wore in preparation for the exam were actually worse for wear in the forest and mountain terrain.

'Hyun-ho was wearing trekking shoes. This is why.'

He was a thorough man. He was meticulous and careful too.

He did not walk just of his own accord like Park Go-chan. He took into account her pace and had adjusted accordingly. When she was tired, he even said let's rest and continue.

She didn't know then.

She now realizes how considerate he had been for her.

'I miss you... '

Tears come to her.

She had only been concerned for her own safety. If Kim Hyun-ho dies, there will be no one to protect her; that is all she had thought.

But as time passed, she kept thinking about the kind of man Kim Hyun-ho was.

Escaping the front lines of employment and nearly 30, he had lived unemployed and was a man who regarded himself as pitiful because of it.

In Lee Hye-su's eyes, he was just an average guy. He was not strong from the beginning. He would have been unwelcome to the violence, and must have been a normal guy stricken in fear.

Every second of every minute he must have been scared.

But he had persevered and won through.

'Even through all that, he had been considerate to me.'

He was indeed a good guy.

It was a cruel thing indeed to only realize so after his death.

"Ack!"

A blister popped and a sharp pain and irritation flooded her at once. Lee Hye-su's legs gave way and she collapsed, sitting on the floor.

"What is it?"

Park Go-chan's voice is full of annoyance. Lee Hye-su ends up bursting into tears.

"Hu hu huk...!"

"Um, are you okay?"

Joon-ho approaches her and asks her concernedly.

Lee Hye-su takes off her tennis shoes. Joon-ho lets out a shout. Her sock is drenched in blood.

"Fucking bitch, you really got all sorts of shit problems."

Lee Hye-su feels a sudden surge of anger.

She had not done anything so terrible to warrant such curses. Why it has become such a natural thing for her to receive such verbal abuse from a human like that, it was unjust and angering.

'I know it is scary. I was so scared too. I still am. But persevere a bit more and cross that mountain.'

Kim Hyun-ho's words suddenly pop into her head.

'A bastard like you has no right to be this way to me! Don't speak as if I have to thank you for saving me!'

The boiling rage inside her led her to courage.

"...just go."

"What?"

"Just leave me and go. Then its problem solved."

"Should I just leave you then? You want to turn into ape food, huh?!"

"I don't want to live, so just go!"

Her yelling, full of hate, spread out loud and resonated. Park Go-chan's face shows he is perplexed.

Lee Hye-su glares up at Park Go-chan.

“A good person like Hyun-ho died! I don’t know why I have to live suffering like this. Why should I when a person who was so kind and who worked so hard to live, has died!”

“What, what is this bitch saying?”

Park Go-chan stumbles on his words.

Without a desire to live, there was no reason for her to be weak under Park Go-chan anymore.

The rage that had compounded inside her just erupts.

“And you! Did you think I couldn’t make out your clear intentions? That you would keep swearing and threatening and bothering me, and then later sweet talk to me, that I would fall for it? If I die, I’d rather just die than be with you, motherfucker!”

“This, this fucking bitch!”

Park Go-chan summons his sword and arms his right hand with it. Even so, the once erupted Lee Hye-su was not scared at all.

“Oh, just kill me then. You want to rape me then kill me? That’s all that’s in your dumb skull! But you know what? You think you’ll be safe doing that shit to another examinee?”

“W-what?”

At the unexpected stab, Park Go-chan is flustered.

“You’re just strong in the fucking mouth but you’re just as useless as me. Actually, you were just being distracting! In my opinion, never mind a prize, but I think you’ll get a punishment instead? Go ahead and kill me! Let’s see if you’re safe then! Kill me!”

“You bitch!”

Jjak!

“Ack!”

As Park Go-chan slaps her across the face, she falls over.

But the one with a bad expression on their face is Park Go-chan.

'Penalty?'

Her words have weight.

To be honest, aside from Kim Hyun-ho and Kang Chun-seong, no one was really helpful.

At least Lee Joon-ho has good cooperation. Park Go-chan himself only caused problems. He himself is aware of it.

In a fight he only barely survived, and didn't make a big contribution. Overall, he may be less help than Lee Hye-su. At least she cooked and did the chores.

He had completely forgotten about it.

That the angel was grading their exam.

Lee Hye-su who had fallen over laughed manically.

"There is an angel, I hope there is a heaven and hell. It's obvious where you'll end up."

The word 'hell' made Park Go-chans heart shake ever more.

"I'm not going. Seeing hell here, I'm going to just die and go to heaven. At least I lived my life kindly!"

After puking out all her feelings, Lee Hye-su leans up her back against a tree.

Park Go-chan didn't know what to do and awkwardly just stood there, and Lee Joon-ho tactfully stared at the two.

And then,

"Let's rest here."

It was Kang Chun-seong who had opened his mouth.

As usual, without enthusiasm and an expressionless expression, he continued to speak.

"They aren't chasing us."

"Oh, now that I look at it..."

Joon-ho now realizes that for a while now, the red apes haven't been pursuing them. And in the forest, the red apes are much faster than them too.

Kang Chun-seong hangs out on top of a boulder.

Lee Joon-ho too looks around and then sits where he stands and rests.

In the end, they decide to camp here for the day.

But there is a problem.

"What do we do about a meal?"

There is no one with a reply for Lee Joon-ho's answer.



Burn, burn.

My rabbit is grilling nicely.

It would be nice if there was some salt, but there is no such luxury as being able to eat this all by myself.

'I wonder if, right about now, all of them are starving?'

No way. I'm sure they found some fruit, or at least caught a fish from the brook and ate it. There's four of them, they wouldn't starve just because I'm not there, would they?

I originally thought I would be able to catch up to them before the evening.

But killing the leader and escaping right after has used a lot of my energy and thus, my walking speed became much slower, and eventually, I had come to the conclusion that

I must set up camp alone.

'Is Lee Hye-su be okay?'

Now that I'm not there, Park Go-chan probably took up leadership. Joon-ho is very passive, and Kang Chun-seong is still closed off to a strange degree.

I can easily picture Park Go-chan walking in the front and dissing Lee Hye-su.

'He probably thinks I'm dead and he will be in extra high spirits because of it.'

After talking last night with just the two of us, my feeling towards Lee Hye-su have evolved to become a bit more than just simple fondness.

Am I lonely because I'm alone?

Sitting alone in front of the fire, I keep thinking of her.

How nice would it be if she were sitting right beside me now. I imagine the image of us two sitting here by the fire, and promising each other to join forces and survive.

"This won't do."

I pack away my half eaten rabbit and get up from my seat. I put out the fire and began to walk again.



Never mind a meal, the fire is barely started. After hours of trial and error, the fire was barely lit.

The tired group decide on their sentry order and fall asleep early.

Lee Joon-ho finishes the first sentry and changes shift with Lee Hye-su.

"How is your foot?"

"Well..."

"Good luck. If something happens, wake us up right away."

Lee Hye-su nods her head. Lee Joon-ho falls asleep and she passes the time, alone, staring at the flames of the fire.

She remembers the day's events.

It was the first time in her life she ever let out such rage at someone.

In those moments, her soul felt free but as time passed it became uncomfortable. It is not guilt. Thinking about what she had endured under Park Go-chan, those curses were not enough.

It is just that due to it, a conflict had emerged.

Not knowing how Park Go-chan's grudge would take its revenge made her nervous and fearful.

'Why do I have to endure such... '

At her own situation, the tears come.

It was a car accident.

After working late and on her way home, she had crashed into a reckless passenger car. And when she came to, she was in a blank white world and met the baby angel. That's how she became an examinee.

After finishing the first exam and returning to reality, she was in the hospital. It was the doctor's opinion that she was miraculously not hurt anywhere.

Today in particular, she kept thinking how it would have been if she had gave up on the exam and just went on her way to the road to the afterlife.

Passing the time thinking depressing thoughts, Lee Hye-su got up to take care of some business.

Being the only girl, she had to be tactful when taking care of her period needs. That's why she tended to hold it all in and take care of business at night.

Lee Hye-su left the fire and goes off into the forest for a moment.

Then...

Park Go-chan opens his eyes.

'Bitch, finally, there she goes.'

With a nasty grin on his face, Park Go-chan tip toes in the direction she disappeared in.

Chapter 22

Murder (2)

Lee Hye-su escaped to a dark and remote place and once again, carefully looked around her surroundings. Being alone in the dark of night gave her a creepy feeling.

It seemed like no one was there but Lee Hye-su could not relax.

The red apes like to hide and ambush. They did so in the first exam and they did so the second time when they ambushed on the first night of the second exam. There is nothing to say they won't do it again.

But then.

Dook-

The sound of a twig being stepped on and broken. It is small, but the sound was definitely heard.

“Who, who is it!

Gripped in immense fear, Lee Hye-su firmly grasps her spear. The question is: will she be able to properly wield the shoddy spear that Kim Hyun-ho had made her.

No one came from the place the sound came from. But now she could feel that someone was definitely there.

She stabs in the direction with her spear and with a shaky voice, Lee Hye-su yells out.

“I said come out!”

“For a bitch who wants to die, you’re scared shitless!”

A familiar voice rang out.

‘Park Go-chan!’

It is not a red ape, but Lee Hye-su is actually more frightened now.

Park Go-chan walks out.

He is holding his sword in his right hand. Due to the darkness, his face is hard to make out. But he is sure to be wearing a nasty grin.

“Wha-what?”

“What do you mean what, bitch. You said you want to get fucked and go to heaven? So I came to send you to heaven.”

Park Go-chan is chuckling.

“Get away!”

“You should speak formally to your elder. Or you might die and end up in hell.”

“Hell is for you!”

“I just won’t die then.”

Park Go-chan wields up his sword and continues to speak.

“I thought about it carefully and I can’t undo all the bad things I chose to do so far in my life. So I thought. Ah, I guess I just won’t die, then.”

“...!”

“I’m just saying, I just have to finish this shit exam and live to the end. No matter what kind of bastard I am, I just have to finish the exam. Isn’t that why they called me here in the first place? Huh?!”

“S-so?”

“Fucking bitch, if you had just submissively crawled around like you should have, you wouldn’t be in this foul situation, no? Did you think that bastard Kim Hyun-ho would keep on protecting you? The world is as you see, its guys who pretend to be strong like that that die first!”

Park Go-chan abruptly charges at her.

“Kyak!”

Lee Hye-su screams and lifts her spear.

Skuk!

At the swishing sword, her spear is futilely cut. And then Park Go-chan’s fist strikes Lee Hye-su.

“Aak!”

Lee Hye-su effortlessly falls over.

Park Go-chan’s entry level 3 physical strength buff was at level she could not handle.

Park go chan sat on her fallen body. He grabbed both her hands, desperately flailing, and yelled.

“It may feel like shit, but the bastards who live to the end are the guys like me! Got it? You fucking bitch!”

Puuk! Puk!

“Aak!”

At the ruthless punching, Lee Hye-su face swelled up.

Park Go-chan starts taking off her shirt. Lee Hye-su screamed and resisted, but the shirt was roughly ripped apart by his hands.

And then.

“Halt-!”

Park Go-chan’s hands freeze momentarily.

‘What?’

A familiar voice. A voice he thought he'd never hear again.



It has been two hours since I chased after my group's tracks.

Sylph returns from scouting and tells me that the group is at a distance of 900 meters away.

"Not much must have happened to them. Did Hye-su look okay?"

But then Sylph shakes her head at my question.

"What? What is it?"

I ask like that and Sylph has no way to answer that kind of question.

"Is she hurt?"

Shake, shake.

"Then has she been attacked?"

Now Sylph nods her head. From that moment on I run like crazy.

"Is it a red ape?"

I ask as I run. Sylph shakes her head. Then...

It's no school field, and trying to run through a forest is difficult and I feel like my breath will leave me. I grit my teeth and keep on running.

"Sy-sylph, huk (gasp)! Park Go-chan, now, huk! Attack Hye-su?"

I pant and barely get to ask and Sylph nods her head.

"Huk, huk, how many meters are left?"

Sylph draws the number 642. Damn! At this rate, I may be too late.

...Hold on?

The distance that Sylph can be apart from me is 900 meters, right? So that means she can exercise her powers within that 900 meters?

I pause my running for a moment and catch my breath and ask Sylph.

“Can you attack Park Go-chan from here?”

-Meow.

Sylph shakes her head.

Of course.

They said the further a spirit gets from the summoner, the weaker it gets. Even if she does attack, it seems it won't do any damage to Park Go-chan.

But then is there no other way?

I roll through my head and an idea pops up.

“Sylph, can you deliver my voice to them?”

-Meow!

Sylph nods.

‘It's possible!’

I think maybe, and I ask again.

“Then can you deliver their voice to me too?”

-Meow.

She nods again.

‘Impossible!’

I am once again surprised at Sylph's usefulness. The wind spirit is an incredible means of long distance communication!

"Sylph, then will you deliver my words to Park Go-chan and Hye-su?"

-Meow.

Now, in a loud voice I yell 'halt!'

Sylph delivers my message and returns and I continue to yell.

"Any bullshit, and I'll shoot! I'm aiming at your head!"

I yell that and then ask Sylph to deliver Park Go-chan's message back to me.

It is, of course, crap.

My magic rifle distance range is just 60 meters. But my bluff definitely has an effect.

"Where are you?!"

Sylph delivers Park Go-chan's voice to me. The alarmed Park Go-chan's voice it is clear as if he is right next to me. Interesting, indeed.

"Where? If I pull the trigger it will hit your head!"

"Co-come out!"

"I don't want to?"

"You'll shoot me? You think you can?"

"Yeah, I can shoot."

"Haha, yeah right. You ever kill a person before? You'll shoot me?"

"I've killed plenty that are close to human. If I shoot, whether it's your skull or a red ape's skull, I think the exploding will be the same."

"..."

Maybe the threat worked because Park Go-chan, out of fear, does not reply.

He has no way of knowing that I am still more than 500 meters away.

“Sylph, is he holding a weapon?”

-Meow.

“Okay.”

I yell at Park Go-chan again.

“Hand over the weapon to Hye-su. Try any bullshit and I’ve told Sylph to cut you.”

“Hey, let’s not do this, how about a bargain?”

“...?”

“You’re real interested in her too. I know it all. So what are you waiting for? You think if you keep helping her out and being a pushover, she’ll say thanks and give it up once? Bastard, don’t get used and choose the right side here. How about it?”

I am at a loss for words. He’s so dirty I don’t even want to keep exchanging words. I just want to go ahead and shoot him but I can’t so I have to keep talking.

“That’s an interesting suggestion.”

“Haha, isn’t it?”

“Hand over the weapon to Hye-su and back away.”

“You fucking dumbass!”

“The dumbass is you. You’re pulling shit like this when our lives are at stake?”

“...”

I ask Sylph.

“Can you whisper so that only Hye-su can hear me?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head. Wow, really convenient.

I deliver my words to Hye-su.

"Miss Hye-su, get away from that bastard. Hurry and come this way. Sylph will show you which way."

Moments later, Sylph alerts me that she is coming my way. Alright. Success at getting her away from Park Go-chan.

"Fine, now we good?"

"What do you mean good? Did you think I would just move on like all this never happened?"

"So, what are you going to do about it, bastard?"

"What do you think?"

"Yo-you're going to kill me? A fellow examinee? You're not scared of the penalty?"

'Penalty?'

I haven't thought of that before.

'Now that I think of it, when I finished the first exam and received my karma, it was marked as +500. Does this mean there can be a minus (-) too?'

It is a complete possibility. I hesitate on how to handle Park Go-chan.

The distance is now shrunk to 200 meters. From afar I can see Lee Hye-su, panting and running. It is dark so I cannot make out her face but I am sure she is shaking in horror.

"Over here."

"Hyun-ho!"

Lee Hye-su ran straight into my arms. And she explodes into tears.

She is holding the sword; it seems Park Go-chan handed her his weapon upon my request. Thinking about it though, when he disarms his weapons it will just disappear, I didn't think this through very well.

I am completely surprised but I tap her on the back.

"You're okay now."

"Uh hu hu huk!" (sobbing noise)

I calm Lee Hye-su who is crying in my embrace, and I speak to Park Go-chan.

"Leave this place!"

"What?"

"I said, leave this place. From now on, you will act independently from the rest of us."

"You want me to act alone? That's telling me to die!"

"Then shall I stoke a fire and prepare meals for you? As if nothing has happened? I can't do that. So get lost. Whether you live or die, take care of it on your own."

"Hey, let's not do this and make up. I was wrong. I wasn't in my right mind. You know? You do crazy things when you're in a panic."

"You must've been in a panic your entire life then?"

"You fucker! So what do you want me to do? If you tell me to go off alone, then that's nothing more than telling me to die! You think you'll still be safe! You think after this exam we won't cross paths again in the next one?"

Park Go-chan brazenly replies.

The distance dwindle down and I am less than 100 meters away. If I walk a little more, I will be within shooting distance.

"Hey guy, I said I was sorry. I'll turn over a new leaf so let's try this one more time. You

and me, we're both people that have already died once. Let's not live-or-die with each other."

"..."

What should I do?

He seems sure that I don't have it in me to murder him. That's why the bastard tried to rape a girl and is brazenly trying to stay with the group still.

It can't happen.

I have to shoo him off. But since he is so bent on sticking around, I have no choice but to kill him.

Do I really have to kill him?

And then.

Grip.

Lee Hye-su grabs my hand.

"Please do it."

"Do what?"

"Kill him."

At her words, my heart clunks down.

Her two hands holding mine are trembling.

"I am so miserable I want to die. I can never see his face again. I'm terrified. I would rather die myself. Please, I beg you. Please save me."

"..."

I clench my teeth.

I can see Park Go-chan now. Approximately, 40-50 meters.

I take out the magic rifle. I load a lead bullet. I place the butt of the rifle against my shoulder, and I set the sights on Park Go-chan's head.

Thankfully it is dark and I cannot make out his face. If I had seen the expression on his face, I would not be able to pull the trigger.

Lee Hye-su is tightly holding onto the end of my shirt. As if it was the very life-line that was saving her.

Okay.

Let's think of it that way.

In place of killing Park Go-chan, I am saving Lee Hye-su. Because if I have to pick one to save, it is Lee Hye-su.

Toong-

“Kuk!”

Then that's it.

Chapter 23

Evaluation (Part 1)

“Hyung!”

Jun-ho sees me and his expression is extremely glad. Kang Chun-seong is awake too. He may have woken up from the sound of the shot.

Jun-ho sees Lee Hye-su follow behind me and his face freezes.

I too can now make out Lee Hye-su’s face from the light of the campfire.

‘Aw, damn.’

Her face is pitifully swollen. She was beaten senseless by Park Go-chan. That bastard!

I hold down my boiling rage and speak.

“We were attacked by red apes on our way over. Thankfully we handled them but sadly, Park Go-chan didn’t make it.”

“...”

A chilly silence falls on us.

The awfully beaten Lee Hye-su, the gunshot, Park Go-chan’s death. Joon-ho and Kang Chun-seong have no way of knowing what these things imply.

“Moreover, let’s rest. You guys eat?”

“Uh, no, not yet.”

Joon-ho awkwardly stumbled out a reply. I take out the half eaten portion of grilled rabbit I had placed in my pocket earlier.

“Okay, for now, eat this. We will properly hunt and eat tomorrow.”

“Wow, thank you.”

“Miss Hye-su, come sit down and eat too.”

“Yes...”

Lee Hye-su sits down next to me and takes a chunk of grilled rabbit.

“Here.”

I throw a piece to Kang Chun-seong as well. He catches it and asks me.

“How did the thing you left to go do go?”

“I succeeded in killing their leader. Seeing as how after that none of them chased after me, I don’t think we have to worry about the red apes anymore.”

“Wow, hyung you’re really amazing!”

“What do you mean I’m amazing. It’s all thanks to Sylph.”

“But still. How did you think to barge in alone and kill their leader? It’s really amazing. You’re going to get so much karma when this exam is over”

“Yeah, thanks. Anyway, tomorrow when the day brightens, let’s move to a safe location spend the remaining time with our hearts calm.”

“Okay.”

We finish our meal and go back to sleep.

“I will be the sentry. It’s because I can’t sleep. You should all sleep.”

“Hyung, you must be the most tired.”

“It’s okay. It’s because I can’t sleep.”

“Then I’ll head off to bed. If you get tired, just wake me up.”

“Alright.”

Everyone goes to sleep and I think to myself in the silence.

'I'm sure he's dead.'

I am sure he's dead. Because I saw him spewing blood from his neck and fall over.

I could not find the courage and didn't verify Park Go-chan's body. I just took Lee Hye-su and spun back around to here.

...I killed a person.

The corpse of the person I just killed will still be in its place. It will be neglected there for all eternity. Who knows, a red ape or some other beast may come upon it and eat it.

And so the life of the man named Park Go-chan ended. At my hand.

I look down at my right hand.

It's shaking.

The sensation of pulling on the trigger has still not disappeared.

I become miserable at the thought that this sensation might never leave my memory.

I did nothing wrong.

He was deserved to die. He was someone who, had I let live, might have taken his revenge on me when I wasn't looking. Had he been a man of good priorities, he would not have tried to rape a comrade during an exam of life and death.

He was a bastard that lived just as he pleased. If only but for the purposes of going forward in the exams, I could not let him live.

'Yep, I did nothing wrong.'

I think that in my head but my heart feels different.

I recall Park Go-chan's voice that shook in fear at my threats.

He did.

Even human trash like him, he didn't want to die. He wanted to live. A person like that, I ended his life. I pulled the trigger with this finger...

I clench my hand into a fist.

The shaking doesn't go away.

"Are you okay?"

Lee Hye-su's voice brings me back from my distraction. She is looking at me with worried eyes.

"Yes, I'm okay."

She gets up from her seat and comes close to me.

She grabs my hand with both of hers.

There is a certain warmth to them.

The light from the fire reflects on her face, where the puffiness hasn't dissipated. It hurts my heart. How could he just beat a woman so. He was a motherfucker. I did good to kill him. I saved this woman.

"Really, thank you."

"No worries."

"And I'm sorry. Because of me..."

"No, don't be. I had thought I should kill him too. I just couldn't because I didn't have the courage to. I only found the courage thanks to you."

I am holding her hand and it strangely makes the shaking go away.

We stayed that way for a while. Holding hands. Using hands to exchange our heat, that quiet time, it felt so good it almost felt strange. Like frozen snow that melts, my heart warms up.

“Do you want to go?”

“Where?”

“To him.”

I am startled at her words.

“There is... nothing good to come of looking at the corpse.”

“No. In my opinion I think it will be worse to move on without seeing the body.”

She continues to speak in a shaky voice.

“Is he really dead, what about the body, is he actually alive and plotting revenge... these thoughts won’t go away. You too, right?”

“...yes.”

“So let’s go together. Let’s verify that he really is dead and give him a proper burial. I’m too scared to go alone but I think I’ll be okay if you come with me.”

Her words are right.

To just go on, I may never be able to forget Park Go-chan. I have to tie the knot for sure and move on.

“Okay, let’s go. But what should we dig the grave with?”

“I’m not sure. Um, would this not work?”

She shows me the sword. Its Park Go-chan’s sword.

“Huh, its owner died and it’s still here.”

“I know.”

“Can you try saying ‘weapon cancel?’”

“Weapon cancel?”

Then,

Pat! Goes the sword and disappears.

Her and I both are surprised.

“It, it disappeared?”

“This time, try saying ‘equip.’”

“Equip.”

As she said it, the sword appeared in her right hand. With her eyes wide open, Lee Hye-su speaks.

“Why is this following my commands?”

“I’m not really sure... What...”

In an instant, I understand what must be happening.

‘Hand over the weapon to miss Hye-su.’

That’s it! Back then, Park Go-chan handed the sword over to Lee Hye-su, and that transferred the ownership.

I explain this to Lee Hye-su.

“So then this is mine now?”

“Yes, you didn’t have a weapon, this is fortuitous.”

“I’m not sure if I can use this. It’s very heavy. Why don’t you or Joon-ho use it instead...”

“But still, for now, hold on to it. It’s difficult to use now because its heavy, but later when you get the physical strength buff, you’ll be able to use it.”

We go to where Park Go-chan died.

We are able to see his dead body.

He is effortlessly strewn on the ground, on ground that is drenched in blood. A surprised expression on his face and a red hole in his neck.

I had no confidence in facing the body, but now that I have, it's not as scary as I thought it would be.

'Miss Hye-su, it's a good thing we came like you suggested.'

If I had run away without seeing this, it might have remained as a scary memory forever.

"Let's start. I'll go first."

"Okay"

I receive the sword from her and start to dig. I continue the job of hammering into the ground and digging out the dirt.

Taking turns with Lee Hye-su, as the sun rose bit by bit, in the early morning, a decent hole was dug. We shoved Park Go-chan into it and bury him.

I use Sylph to make a gravestone out of a thick branch. I engrave it 'Park Go-chan' and place it on top of the grave.

"There was no other option. Live more kindly in the next life."

I say those simple words and take a moment of silence. Was that too cocky? But I have nothing else in particular to say. His bad luck is all of his own doing.

Lee Hye-su closes her eyes too and takes a moment of silence. I wait, without a word, until she is done.

"It's done now."

She opens her eyes and lets out a big smile. I think to myself that even though her face is swollen purple, her smile is still quite attractive.

We head back together to the campfire. We sit next to each other and share all kinds of stories.

We exchange stories of our lives and she was indeed a girl who grew up in a wealthy and happy family, living a comfortable life and grew up as an intelligent lady.

Perhaps for those reasons but she found the stories of my family to be incredibly entertaining. A mean older sister and an obnoxious younger sister that likes to party, a cute mother obsessed with her son. This and that, lots of stories came out.

And so we talked not knowing time passing by, when she said this.

“Actually, I have something to confess.”

“What is it? Just say.”

“That is, I, I told a lie.”

At those words, I smiled.

“You mean when you said you had the entry level 1 physical strength buff?”

“Oh, how did you know?”

I talk to a surprised her.

“Your physique is lower than mine so there was no way I wouldn’t have known.”

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t want to be labelled as a total burden to the team with having absolutely no power... even though that’s how it ended up. Just being a pain for everyone.”

“There is no need to think that way. Just think of my aid as an investment in the future.”

“Investment?”

“Yes, you may be weak now, but you will receive karma and grow your skills and be able to make your rightful contributions. So, for now, just think of yourself as a probationary employee.”

“Thank you.”

“Anyway, how much karma did you get in the first exam? You came without a skill, let

alone a weapon, so it does seem weird.”

“Honestly...”

She fussed and waited, and then Lee Hye-su spoke.

“-50.”

“...huh?”

“-50.”

“If a minus...”

“I did not succeed in the first exam.”

Lee Hye-su tells an astonished me the whole story.

Simply put, she was not able to defeat the red ape but she wasn’t killed by it either. She had resisted and ran and fought back and when the 30 minutes were barely up and the exam door appeared, she made a run for it.

“I guess that means failing the exam doesn’t mean you die.”

“Yes, but I was fearful the whole time about how the minus would affect me.”

“Don’t worry. You will be able to make up for the minus with this exam.”

“But there is nothing I did for this exam either. What will I do if I don’t keep getting stronger and just stay a burden?”

She is nervous and I pat her on the shoulder.

“Do not worry too much. The way I see it, fighting isn’t everything to the exam. There is definitely a role you can assume in different areas. Just find those areas and earn enough karma to get the skills. Until then, I will protect you.”

“Hyun-ho...”

She seems moved and stares at me.

“What will I do. Always just getting help from you...”

“I do have one request, will you grant it?”

“Yes, whatever it is.”

At her ‘whatever’ I immediately think a dirty thought. I’m such a bastard!

I do a fake cough and speak.

“Just call me oppa. It’s a bit toe-curling hearing Hyun-ho, Hyun-ho.”

Lee Hye-su lets out a short burst of laughter.

“Got it. Then Hyun-ho, I mean oppa, you lower your speech to me too.”

“Yes. I mean, kay.”

We look at each other and laugh shyly.

Chapter 24

Evaluation (Part 2)

The remaining time flowed flatly. We passed the time smoothly without any threat to our lives.

The biggest danger we did get was just some rain. We had to take our rain drenched bodies back to the cave by the ravine we were at before. Thankfully, the hundreds of red apes that were in the nearby area had all gone and left.

Now that Park Go-chan was gone, it was peaceful.

Hye-su and Joon-ho decided to go brother-sister relationship and the three of us became close. The closed up Kang Chun-seong was his usual self.

Anyhow, after that day, Lee Hye-su became different. She tried her hardest at everything.

As soon as I caught a rabbit, she learned from me on how to butcher it. She didn't blink an eye and cut the ankles and flipped off the hide.

Not only that, but she did all the cooking and even brought a bunch of berries that she found while she was out gathering kindle.

As the uneventful free time grew, Kang Chun-seong started practicing his martial arts. Joon-ho began exercising and Hye-su continually searched the forest for things to eat like fruit.

I had time to organize and understand the skills that Sylph and I learned from this exam.

First, long distance communication.

Using Sylph to deliver speech is possible within a distance of 900 meters. It can be made to only be heard by one person as well.

Second, sound removal.

It is a skill to move around discretely by getting rid of noise. Using this, I was able to infiltrate the gang of red apes and kill their leader.

Third, smell removal.

It's a way to eradicate my odor from passing through the air. Using the sound removal and the smell removal together, I was able to successfully catch a rabbit with my bare hands, the effect is that good.

Fourth, oxygen concentration.

It's a way to concentrate the oxygen to make it easier to light a fire, but I am also thinking that I could concentrate it to create explosives in a fight. For example, I concentrate the oxygen then throw a torch out.

Fifth, wind knife.

It is a good, viable way to attack while in close range. I passed many dangers with this. It causes a lot of damage so it uses a lot of strength, so I can only really use it when I really need it.

'I'm only alive thanks to Sylph.'

Sylph's incredible usefulness!

I consider myself so lucky that I chose the spirit summon as my main skill.

Things like aura control are very useful for martial artists like Kang Chun-seong but it wouldn't be much help to a layperson like me.

And we passed by the remaining time like this and then in front of the cave, the exam door appeared.

"Wow. It's finally over."

Joon-ho had a moved expression on his face.

"The first thing I'm going to do when I get back is take a bath" said Hye-su.

Then again, we didn't really have a way to properly wash while we've been here.

Couldn't change our underwear or socks so we're sure to feel a bit grimy.

"Let's go."

I lead the pack and open the exam door and go through.



Boo boo boooo

"Wow! Congratulations!"

Here we go again.

The bbundegi bastard is blowing on his horn and disorientingly flitting about here and there.

And it isn't only me, but everybody else is looking at the obnoxious childish baby angel with unkind gazes.

It's only natural to be filled with rage after suffering like a dog then returning to see this shit show.

"You all are looking at me with such loving eyes. Did you miss me that much?"

The baby angel has a way of pouring gasoline on the fire of rage.

"You bastard. Stop that and hurry up and evaluate us."

At my words, the baby angel shrugs his shoulders.

"But the evaluation is already done? Check your boards."

"Board retrieval"

Class: 5

Karma: +900

Mission: Survive the time limit (complete)

Time limit: -

5 class, 900 karma. Is this a good grade? I wonder what other people got?

“It is indeed a good grade.”

The baby angel abruptly shoves his face up to mine.

At that, I get startled and take a step back and grind my teeth.

“Would you not just read my thoughts and abruptly interrupt me?”

At that, the baby angel chews (ignores) my words and turns the conversation around.

“Examinee Kim Hyun-ho again sets the record. In the 2nd exam, of all examinees ever, you have received the greatest score.”

“The best grade ever? Me?”

“Yes. There has never been an examinee that has received 900 karma until now”

“900 karma.”

“Oh wow.”

Everyone exclaims and looks at me

The baby angel looks away and continues to speak.

“You’ve earned as much karma as the other examinees combined. My eyes didn’t deceive me. I told you that you are a person that is capable of it.”

“...”

“Look at your contributions in the exam. You infiltrated in the dead of night, killed the red ape Rode, and you got rid of the uncooperative person who kept being a negative distraction to the team.”

Negative distraction. That is the description for Park Go-chan.

“Every moment, every second, your decision making and actions were very definitive and calculated. What average human would be able to do as examinee Kim Hyun-ho did? Now do you realize that you aren’t just an average person, but a very special human indeed?”

“...”

I have nothing to reply back with. The inside of my head is complicated. I was sure of the fact that I had to kill Park Go-chan. The fact that he tried to rape Lee Hye-su was a good opportunity for it. A good opportunity to cross the threshold of murder...

Perhaps I am like the baby angel said and I’m not like the average person. Even though I have thought myself a plain, weak, and slightly pitiful person.

“Now now, shall we evaluate the others? Examinee Kang Chun-seong, examinee Lee Joon-ho, and examinee Lee Hye-su earned 400, 300, 200 karma respectively.”

3 people’s score really is my grade. But Kang Chun-seong’s grade is lower than I thought it would be. I wonder why.

“How much of your strength did you use, how much did you contribute to clearing the mission? The grade evaluates these 2 things. In these respects, examinee Kang Chun-seong.”

The baby angle flapped his wings and approached Kang Chun-seong.

“You were wondering this because your grade was lower than you thought it would be.”

“Indeed.”

“Your role was a big help in getting your group past danger. But on the other hand, you were a distraction in clearing the mission.”

“Distraction?”

Kang Chun-seong’s brow furrows.

“How did you leave Park Go-chan’s actions alone? Was it not a problem that could’ve been solved by a single word from you?”

“...”

“Of course, not doing everything you possibly could have done isn’t automatic grounds for deduction but examinee Kang Chun-seong was definitely a distraction for your group relationship.”

It was at Kang Chun-seong’s questioning face that the baby angel continued his explanation.

“You suppressed examinee Park Go-chan but after that, with your disinterested behavior, you allowed the disorganized group ranking to continue and let Park Go-chan be a conflicting factor.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you weren’t present, the ranking would have been decided early on. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho would have used his gun and his spirit to threaten Park Go-chan’s life so that he would no longer continue to be a bother. And then perhaps the situation where he had to be killed wouldn’t have arisen.”

“...”

“Well then. Anything else you curious about? If not, I’ll send you all home.”

“Hold on!”

It was Hye-su that raised her hand and spoke up.

“What is it? You’re such a bother.”

“Um... a bother...”

Hye-su’s face showed a hurt expression.

“I’ll be quick about it. You’re wondering why you got 200 karma when there was nothing you did. That’s because one of the ways of evaluation is by seeing how much of your given abilities was used. Examinee Lee Hye-su had not even a rat’s ass worth

of capability but all else considered, you worked really hard. You good?"

"Oh..."

Then even counting the -50, she will have 150 karma left. Thank goodness. Working hard definitely pays off.

Her good fortune as like my own good fortune and I was happy.

"Ok. Then go on home."

The baby angel was like a delinquent part time employee shooing us out of a store as he created the exam door.

As everyone starts to head out, I quickly shout

"Hold on! Hold on!"

The three people halt and look back at me.

"Before you go, give me your contact information. Actually, I'll just give you my cell phone number so please memorize it and contact me. During our rest period, we should meet up and consult about our next exam."

"Oh right."

"I hadn't thought of that."

Joon-ho and Hye-su agree.

"Aww I thought you had all forgotten and I was laughing inside. What a pity."

That bastard.

I look at the baby angel and grind my teeth.

After the three people memorized my number, we returned to the world of reality.



“Son...”

I opened my eyes and an ajumma that looks like she would be really good a frying chicken looks at me desperately.

“What mom?”

“Its 11 am and you’re still sleeping?”

“...originally, smart people have to sleep a lot.”

“What about Napoleon?”

“That guy? He had the height of a loser. I’m an Einstein type. I need to sleep 10 hours a day.”

“Son. I know I said I’d let you rest for this month, but you really reek of unemployment. Just try living a little harder, ok?”

“Ok mom. Speaking of which, so I can be rising star of the fried chicken business, I’ve been exercising every day.”

“Alright. You always had a way with words. I’m going to drop by the bank and then go to the store.”

“Ok. Come back safely.”

Mom left the house and then it was empty. I go to the kitchen and go to the fridge and there is water and all kinds of food and ramen stacked in the pantry. There are eggs and plenty of kimchi and beer in the kimchi fridge.

“I’ve really come back.”

To think it is so easy to get food and something to drink.”

I am moved and have never thought of this before.

“Oh mom. Thank you for feeding and raising me. Turns out eating and living is

extremely difficult."

I pop an egg in my ramen and even put some rice in it and finish in a pinch.

I eat my fill and even drink a can of beer when my phone vibrates. I check it and I've gotten a text message.

(TN: Brackets '[]' indicate text messages.)

[Is this Hyun-ho oppa? This is Hye-su ^^]

Hye-su has immediately contacted me. How could even the smiling face be so adorable.

[You're up? I just had rice in my ramen and I'm being moved by a can of beer lol]

[Haha sounds yummy! Bi-bim-bap for me! With tons of red pepper paste]

(TN: Bi-bim-bap is served as a bowl of warm white rice topped with *namul* (sautéed and seasoned vegetables) and *gochujang* (chili pepper paste), soy sauce, or *doenjang*, a fermented soybean paste. A raw or fried egg and sliced meat (usually beef) are common additions. The hot dish is stirred together thoroughly just before eating.)

[Eat it deliciously ^^ Oh, and don't use your karma, just leave it for now. We can all consult later and make a plan]

[Okay ^^ If you get Jun-ho's number please let me know]

[Ok]

I save Hye-su's contact number. After saving it into contacts as 'Hye-su <3' I save her as speed dial 1. Who cares? No one is going to look at my phone.

I finish my meal and open my ancient laptop and get online.

There are things I must do to prepare for the next exam.

'Oh, I almost forgot. How long is the rest period?'

I retrieve my board.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 5

-Karma: +900

-Mission: Rest until the next exam.

-Time limit: 15 days

-You may receive a karma prize. To receive the karma prize, after retrieving the board, say 'karma prize'.

Half a lunar cycle.

The rest period has gotten longer since last time.

At the thought of there still being plenty of time left, my heart feels stronger.

'I have to use this time wisely. I'll just finish this and go hike.'

I have decided to hike and do pushups every day.

Even at the second exam, the exercise I did for the ten days prior was a lot of help. Thanks to the hikes, I was able to adjust to the mountain terrain, and I was able to withstand the difficulty my body endured.

I'm online and I begin to write on all kinds of community sites.

Chapter 25

Proposition (Part 1)

(TN: He's writing a blog post)

[Title: Dreamt a strange dream.

Content: Last night I had a strange dream.

It was a white and empty world, void of anything. A revolting looking baby angel appeared, flapping like a sparrow. He spoke of nonsense commandments and exams.

Anyway, I asked him for the lotto numbers and he actually game them to me! This week I will scratch my lotto tickets. If I get first place, I will confirm. (Honest) I hope you all have good dreams too haha]

Yes, this should suffice.

A white world, an angel, commandments, exam. All the important keywords are in there.

I might be ignored if I write it too sincerely so I purposely put in the stuff about the lotto, but a fellow examinee will recognize it and contact me through email.

After copy-pasting this message onto multiple places, I put on my sweats and leave the house to go hiking.

On my way up the Mount Taejo hiking trail, I am contacted from Joon-ho.

-This is Hyun-ho hyung's cell phone, correct?

"Indeed. You too have awoken."

-Yeah, hyung. Did you get Hye-su noona's contact info?

"Yep."

-What're you doing right now?

"I ate and now I'm hiking.

-Hike?

"Exercise should be consistent."

-Really? After getting the entry level 2 physical buffer, I haven't bothered with exercising or anything at all.

Hm? After hearing it, that makes sense. If you use a bit of karma to get the physical buffer and gain an impressive physique, it negates the prize of earning it through hard work.

"Now that I hear it like that, that makes sense. Anyway, it's something I've been doing every day so I'm going to continue. Oh by the way, have you used the karma you received?"

-No, I haven't used it yet.

"Then don't use it and leave it for now. Let's meet up and consult with each other and then carefully decide."

-Will do. When should we meet up?

"I'm not sure. I'll give you a call about it later."

-Okay, hyung.

I finish the call and save Joon-ho's number. In the address book, I make and put him in the 'Arena' group and move Hye-su's number over to this group too.

It seems in the meantime my physique has improved quite a bit. Reaching the peak of Mount Taejo and coming down isn't as difficult as it used to be. I was able to directly finish the hike without taking a break once.

"Then again, compared to fighting those anthropoid beasts, this is a piece of cake."

It's after I return home and finish a shower.

Wing, wing (zing, zing).

The smartphone vibrates. I check the number and it's a restricted caller ID.

'Who could this be?'

I decide to pick it up.

"Hello?"

-It's me.

If you say me, who am I supposed to know who you are?

...is what I want to say but I was clearly able to make out who it is by the voice.

"Kang Chun-seong?"

-Yes.

"Oh, it's a good thing you called. I made contact with the others. If you could give me your contact info..."

-Right now I do not have a contact number. In the future, I will reach out to you if need be.

"Oh, okay?"

I wonder what happened?

-It would be good to meet in person. Where is your house?

"It is in Cheonan. You can come to the Cheonan train station or the Cheonan express bus terminal.

-I will depart now. I will contact you when I arrive.

"What? Hold, hold on...!"

-Click.

The call ends.

I am extremely flustered but I decide to hold it in for now. But still at least he contacted me to meet up first. It seems after receiving the harsh judgement from the baby angel, he is in his own way, repentant.

I do some push-ups and read the comments on my internet posts and pass the time.

This time again, a restricted number gives me a call.

“Yes, Kang Chun-seong, where are you?”

-Cheonan station, eastern square.

“Okay, I will be there soon.”

I change my clothes and head out.

I loiter around at the entrance of the eastern square at Cheonan station when someone taps me from behind on my shoulder. I turn around and its Kang Chun-seong.

“Let’s go.”

“Yes, did you eat?”

“Not yet.”

“Me neither. There is a restaurant nearby where we could eat while we...”

“We can get the food to go. I want to talk where no one else is around.”

“Oh, okay, then let’s do that.”

Kang Chun-seong says he does not care what kind of food. So we buy a pizza and a cola. Kang Chun-seong must have had a place in mind because he takes the lead and goes to a nearby shopping building. I follow him up the stairs and we arrive at the rooftop.

Obviously there is no one on the rooftop.

“I have no other option as I am being chased. I apologize for inconveniencing you.”

“When you say chased, are you possibly talking of the police?”

“The police and the Incheon gang.”

I had surmised as much but it seems to be a complicated situation indeed.

We take a slice of pizza each and begin to eat.

As we eat, Kang Chun-seong speaks.

“I caused adverse circumstances in the last exam.”

“No worries, it was nothing.”

“I apologize; I was a distraction to the exam.”

“No, that isn’t true. Do not pay heed to what that angel bastard said.”

“No, it was an accurate judgment. I made the group uncomfortable. I am sure I would have been able to control a guy like Park Go-chan with a few threatening words.”

“But it is because you took the lead and headed up the fights that we all made it out alive. And that’s why you got 400 karma. You made a contribution which is why you received the prize, if you were nothing but a distraction, you probably would not have received anything at all.”

“Perhaps.”

Kang Chun-seong smiles a bitter smile.

“Since you are our leader, it seems you must listen to my situation.”

“No, what do you mean I’m the leader...”

“Not only the angel, but I too took notice of your decision making. To be able to pass all the exams, you must lead us. I thank you in advance.”

“Well, okay, I thank you too.”

Without another option, I took up the role of leader. Since I was the one who practically led the group anyway.

“I am a person that was trained in the martial arts way from Shanghai.”

And so began Kang Chun-seong’s story.



Kang Chun-seong’s life began its twists and turns when he rescued a humiliated friend.

When the friend took out a loan and was being threatened with his life from the thugs, Kang Chun-seong had no choice but to intervene in order to save his friend.

Using a broker, while he was in the process of smuggling his friend in to Korea, he got into a fight with the gang and sent 15 of them to the hospital.

Eventually, he became a target for the gang as well and had no choice but to escape to Korea with his friend.

The troubles continued to ensue.

His friend and him became contracted workers for a factory in Incheon but because of their illegal immigrant status, they were unable to get due compensation.

After beating the factory boss, the friend and Kang Chun-seong were looking for a way to survive when they became participants in an Incheon gang.

The friend just became a gang member, but Kang Chun-seong’s impressive skills made him a guard to the gang boss and he received special treatment for it.

“Then how did it come to pass that you are being chased by this gang now?”

At my question, Kang Chun-seong bitterly speaks.

“It turns out the Shanghai gang with which I had my quarrels had spread their hand to Incheon, using Chinatown as their center. The Incheon gang made some kind of deal with the bastards and as a show of friendship, they offered up my friend and me.”

“Oh...”

“And so my friend and I lost our lives, and I was given the opportunity to live again as an examinee.”

“And what happened to your friend?”

“He picked the road to the beyond. I heard so from the angel. He was too tired to continue living.”

“...and what happened after?”

“First, I turned the Incheon boss that had turned us over into a hemiplegic.* I disabled about 15 of the members too so either the gang is bust or they are chasing me out of revenge, one of the two.”

(TN: Half paralyzed.)

It's a chilly story.

Having mastered the aura control, Kang Chun-seong's revenge would have gone on without a hitch.

“Thanks to that, I'm now being chased by the police but I don't care. I have become even stronger with the 400 karma I received this time.”

“Oh, you used your 400 karma already?”

“I did.”

Crap.

It would have been better to use it after consulting as a group.

“Can you not tell me where you used it?”

“I must tell you. I used all 400 karma and got the medium level 1 physical strength buff.”

For a moment, I was doubting my hearing.

“Medium? Not entry level?”

“It turns out after entry level 5 is medium level 1. I had an entry level 5 body to begin with.”

Already at aura control entry level 4 and physical strength buff medium level 1! I get shivers at Kang Chun-seong’s awesomeness. Just how strong is this guy?

“So how much is a medium level?”

“Starting at the medium level, it seems to surpass human limitations. I am able to use strength and stamina that is not possible for humans.”

Kang Chun-seong looked down from the edge of the 5th story rooftop.

“If I jump down from here easily would that be explanation enough?”

“That’s truly amazing.”

“Because of the things I experienced, I tried all the more to stay apart from others, but it was the wrong way to think. From now on, I will cooperate with you all the way. I have become stronger since, so I will be of more help in the upcoming exam.”

“Yes, thank you and I look forward to it. But do you not have a place to stay right now? It’s getting cold too.”

“After the medium level 1 physical strength buff, I am immune to cold. It is not a problem.”

“But even so, I am sure you need to eat. For now, at least take this.”

I take out \$40 from my wallet. Surprisingly, Kang Chun-seong passively takes the money.

“I thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. I’ll keep getting help in the exams anyway.”

“Indeed. Anyway for now I am planning on staying in Cheonan and I will give you a call every day around lunch time.”

“Yes, please do. If there is anything you need, give me a call...”

But then at this moment, my smartphone begins to ring. It's a number I don't know.

“Who is this? Sorry, I'm going to take this.”

“Do.”

I say excuse me and pick up the phone.

“Hello?”

-is this Kim Hyun-ho?

It is a business like voice of a woman.

“It is.”

-I am contacting you after reading what you posted.

At those words I get the feeling of my heart just sinking to the floor.

The words I posted? That means she is contacting me after seeing the words I posted online. But how did you get my cell phone number?

“Who is this? And how did you get this number?”

-I'm sorry for calling you out of the blue. I am a researcher at the Korean Arena Research Center by the name of Cha Ji-hye.

“The Korean Arena Research Center?”

At my words, Kang Chun-seong's expression changes.

“It is a government institution?”

-Yes it is. With the support of the country we are aiding examinees like you, Kim Hyun-ho.

Lady Cha Ji-hye continues to talk to a very surprised me.

-You seem to me to be out in Cheonan station, would it be possible to come see us right away?

“How do you know I’m at Cheonan station!”

-We just got you location from this call.

“Who are you people!”

As I get angry, Cha Ji-hye replies.

-If you feel badly about it, I apologize. It was to move things along faster, there are no bad or other intentions to it. You probably don’t have a lot of rest period until your next exam so would it not be better the faster things progress?

“...”

Not long after posting online they found my contact information and with a call got my location. It must be true that this woman is from a government institution.

-I am on the outer ring road heading to Cheonan. Would it be possible to meet up right away? I am, of course, on my way there alone.

I finish the call for now.

I ask Kang Chun-seong.

“What should I do? She said it’s a government institution that recruits examinees and she’s on her way over now.”

“What kind of person was it?”

“A young woman, and according to her, she’s coming alone.”

“A national institution...”

Kang Chun-seong is deep in worry.

He finally speaks.

“Let’s meet her.”

“Should we do that?”

“It seems true she is government group and if they already know your personal details, it is unavoidable.”

“That is true.”

“First, meet her on your own. I will watch from nearby and if anything suspicious happens, I will act accordingly.”

“Okay.”

With Kang Chun-seong as my bodyguard, my heart feels strong like none other.

I call lady Cha Ji-hye again.

-Have you decided?

“Yes, I will meet you. But, I will request one condition. Are you going to do anything bad? Say, kidnap me or...”

-There won’t be anything like that for sure.

“Can I trust you?”

-Think about it sensibly.

Cha Ji-hye lets out a quiet sigh and speaks.

-Would I be able to behave harshly against a strong examinee?

Ah, true.

Chapter 26

Proposition (Part 2)

Kang Chun-seong's strength need not be mentioned and I too, if I put my mind to it, am capable of using Sylph and causing a major accident.

If she has any brains at all, the research center won't behave maliciously towards examinees such as us.

-We found your identity and called you out of the blue so I understand your apprehension. Please, be rest assured that whatever we talk about will not be unfavorable to you.

"I understand. Then we shall meet at Cheonan station."

After hanging up, we go into a nearby coffee shop, one at a time.

Kang Chun-seong seats himself next to the window and watches out of it.

I sit down at a nearby table, drinking an iced Americano, waiting for Cha Ji-hye.

I wonder how much time passed this way.

[I am at Cheonan station.]

A text arrives from Cha Ji-hye. I use a map app to send her our location.

Soon after, a young woman in black formal clothes appears at the café.

'Wow.'

Unbeknownst to me, I am amazed.

She is a beautiful woman for whom a short haircut and black formal clothes are surprisingly appealing on. Her long and firm legs are wrapped in white pants and reminds me of a deer.

As soon as she enters the café, she purposefully walks over to me immediately. It is a strong walk, unlike a woman. Step, step, her red ankle boots hit the floor with discipline.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Kim Hyun-ho.”

“Yes.”

Cha Ji-hye sits directly across from me.

I stare at her and ask.

“Are you a soldier?”

“How did you know?”

Cha Ji-hye’s eyes go big and round.

Her expression is cold but her surprised face is actually pretty cute.

“You don’t waste words, your walk is strong, and your hair is short so it just reminded me of a soldier.”

At this she bites her lower lip and quietly mumbles.

“I still look like a soldier...”

“What?”

“Nothing. Anyway, I will go order and come back.”

She briskly walks over to the counter and puts in an order to the female employee.

“One caramel macchiato, one mint chocolate bagel, and one strawberry waffle set.”

For a moment I almost laugh.

She emanates the soldier pose but orders all these sweet things and its cute. Is she trying to distract me by making me laugh?

I glance over at Kang Chun-seong. Kang Chun-seong gives me a slight nod. It means there are no others.

She finishes her order and returns to the table and starts talking right away.

"I will introduce myself first. I am Cha Ji-hye of the Korean Arena Research Center. I was in the army, bypassed national intelligence agency, and became a researcher at the Korean Arena Research Center."

She's not your average woman.

"When you say researcher, what kind of work do you do?"

"We research any and all information about the existential world, Arena, and its exams. For me, I am in charge of combat and survival., and I am looking to assume the role for caring for the examinees that will join. But..."

Cha Ji-hye glances over to the side as she talks.

"Is the person over by the window an examinee from the same team?"

"...!"

"I knew before I entered the café. You will have verified that I came alone, won't he join us for our talk?"

"...I suppose."

A sharp and discerning eye.

Eventually I call Kang Chun-seong over to our table.

Cha Ji-hye asks of Kang Chun-seong.

"What is your name?"

"I will not say."

Kang Chun-seong bluntly refuses.

As he does so, Cha Ji-hye's eyes glow fiercely.

"Your intonation means you're Chinese."

"..."

"Apart from a height of 185 cm, your well-toned physique may be because of a physical strength buff skill, but I think you are originally fit from having well acquainted yourself from specialty martial arts. And guessing from your extreme wariness, I think I will be able to find out your identity within the day by looking through a police database. Am I wrong?"

'Geez!'

I am astonished. Wrong, my ass. She nearly got it all.

Kang Chun-seong exposes his teeth threateningly.

"You must not have thought that I can shatter your neck."

"Do you really think I came alone?"

"What?"

Even the great Kang Chun-seong makes a surprised face.

Then, Kang Chun-seong's gaze becomes increasingly cold, and the two are locked in a death gaze.

But then.

"The caramel macchiato, mint chocolate bagel, and strawberry set are out."

"Excuse me."

Cha Ji-hye gets up suddenly and runs over.

In an instant, the stormy tension dissipates into nothing.

Perhaps it is due to the plentiful sweets, but Cha Ji-hye returns in a much lighter mood.

She begins cutting her waffles with a knife and talks.

“I did indeed come alone.”

“...”

Kang Chun-seong’s face is blank. I am sure my face is akin to his.

She happily eats her waffles like a normal woman, but doesn’t blink an eye at Kang Chun-seong’s threats. She is originally a soldier and national intelligence, and Cha Ji-hye really isn’t average.

“I don’t like this kind of tension or wariness. We really want to help examinees survive.”

Hm, I cannot just take those words for granted.

Of course, it doesn’t seem like she approached us with bad intentions. But I am sure they are not going to blindly offer us aid either.

At the end of my thought, I open my mouth.

“While I was waiting, I went online. All the posts I made have been erased.”

“Yes, basically to prevent social panic, we are keeping the exams and Arena a secret.”

“Is that all?”

“What do you mean?”

“It didn’t even take half a day for you to find out who I am, erase all my postings, and come meet us ASAP. It seems too fast paced for a Korean government institution.”

“...”

“This is what I am thinking. There are other research centers like this, not just in Korea? I don’t know the reasons why, but they too are trying to convince examinees to join them. I am guessing that there is some benefit to be gained through examinees, or is this all my own delusion?”

“Wow, you are incredible.”

Above Cha Ji-hye’s cold expression is a slight hint of amazement.

“All country research centers are working hard to scout examinees. That is why we are moving so fast. Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, are you by chance your team leader?”

“Yes.”

“Of course.”

She nods her head as she goes on talking.

“As you guessed, there is a benefit to be gained through examinees. That is why we give our utmost support for the survival of examinees, but we do gain a benefit that examinees bring us. There is, amongst our support, a monetary prize.”

“And what is the benefit?”

“It is called majeong.”

“Majeong?”

“All living and moving things from Arena are carried within your bodies. It is like an energy cohesion, and that energy can be used as a very high efficiency energy source, revealed through research done in America.”

“And so competitively using examinees...”

“Yes.”

“What kind of support are you lending in aiding examinee survival?”

“For example, we have this.”

Cha Ji-hye lifts up her sleeve. And underneath it is a charcoal colored outfit that resembles a wet suit.

“It is a battle suit our research center invented. Without some incredible strength, knives won’t penetrate it, and it has incredible thermic capability, making it ideal for

camping. Because you can enter exams with clothes, we have concentrated on performance clothes and shoes.”

“Ah...”

“Not only that, we are collecting and researching information about Arena. We have completed the entire map of Arena, and found out what flora, fauna, and monsters reside in each location.”

“It wasn’t just empty words when you said you support.”

“Of course. Our priority is the survival of examinees. And your friend?”

“I am Kang Chun-seong.”

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong, as long as you are short of being a brutal criminal, we can give you a new identity, with Korean citizenship. There are already a couple examinees living new lives this way.”

“Hm.”

It’s a sweet deal and Kang Chun-seong seems swayed.

“With the majeong you earn from the exams, you can increase your monetary prize and on top of that, based on your various skills, you will receive a salary. How does that sound? Do we still appear a suspicious research center scheming something malicious?”

“No, that is not the case. I would have been suspicious if you told me you were helping like a charity business.”

“You can receive this same deal from other countries, but majeong is a precious energy reserve and working together with your country’s research center will have other benefits. I sincerely wish you decide to join us.”

“It doesn’t sound like a bad thing. I will consult with my team mates and make a decision.”

“Please do. Excuse me, but what turn are you on?”

Turn?

She is probably asking which exam number.

I slyly smile and speak.

“That is a secret.”

Cha Ji-hye makes a small grin.

“You are indeed sensible. I hope you join us. If you accept, I will become the person in charge of your team.”

“I will think it through practically.”

We get up from our seats and shake hands. Then she sits back down in her chair.

“I wish to finish all the food I ordered first...”

“Oh, please do.”

Cha Ji-hye concentrates on eating her waffles and bagel.

The first one to get up is Kang Chun-seong.

“I will depart first. I will contact you in the evening.”

“Please do so.”

Kang Chun-seong leaves and the two of us, Cha Ji-hye and I, are left alone.

She tastily eats her mint chocolate bagel and Cha Ji-hye speaks.

“There are some things I gathered from watching you two, would you like to know what it is?”

“Sure.”

“Seeing as how you haven’t met other examinees, you are under exam 5. You two are still awkward with each other so you’re under exam 3. And Kang Chun-seong may be

a criminal but his faith in you, Kim Hyun-ho, means he is not a bad person.”

‘Damn.’

I’m completely surprised.

She glances up at me and continues.

“Your physique is average but you are the leader, you must have well acquainted yourself with a magical main skill.”

“Well, let’s say that’s true.”

“Is it? You are definitely don’t have a combat skill but if not a magic skill, you are in possession of a more special skill.”

“Let’s stop there.”

“Ha, I understand.”

Then Cha Ji-hye lets out a smile.

Her expression is cold like my older sister, but she is a girl with a rarely seen and cute smile.

After completely finishing her strawberry waffle set, Cha Ji-hye gets up out of her seat.

“It does not matter if it is late at night, so please consult with your team and decide and contact me before this day is up.”

“Aren’t you in too much of a hurry?”

“You are just past the second exam, so your rest period is only 15 days. We must make a decision as soon as possible and then prepare for the next exam. Did you use all your karma yet?”

“No, I haven’t used it yet...”

I say it to that point and then catch myself. Cha Ji-hye lets out another small smile.

“You are definitely past the second turn.”

‘Beat again!’

I am starting to fear this woman.

“Anyway, it’s all good. If you consult with us before using the karma and earn prizes accordingly, it will be all the more beneficial for further exams.”

“Uh, I understand. I will contact you by the end of today.”

“If you agree, we will make the contract and it would be good to go right into exam preparations. Nevertheless, I await your good decision.”

We shake hands and leave the café and part ways.

Right after, I call Joon-ho and Hye-su and explain to them everything that happened today.

Both of them have an enthusiastic response.

“Wow, really hyung? I am of course going to say thank you! Supporting us so we can survive the exams and giving us money, there’s no reason to say no.”

That is Joon-ho’s response.

“What do you think, Hyun-ho oppa? If you agree, so do I.”

That is Hye-su’s response.

Kang Chun-seong contacts me in the evening and he too agrees. It seems it was most pleasing to him, the part about the Korean citizenship.

I send a text to Cha Ji-hye and a reply comes back immediately.

[Please give me the names and address of your team members. We will personally go escort you.]

Chapter 27

The Korean Arena Research Center (1)

11 A.M.

I get an abrupt phone call.

-Is this Mr. Kim Hyun-ho?

“Who is this?”

-I am a research employee.

At his words I am up to attention. It's the Korean Arena Research Center.

-I have arrived at Cheonan to escort Mr. Kim Hyun-ho and Kang Chun-seong.

“I have not heard from Kang Chun-seong yet so you will have to wait a while.”

-I will be waiting at a location close to your place so please call me when you receive word from him.

“Yes.”

She said she would send cars to the team members and she meant it. Not only that but they are early and waiting, they are really devoted.

The national employees researching Arena must really be pouring their heart and soul into scouting examinees.

‘If I had played and tugged with another country’s research center I could’ve received a better offer. Well, too bad since I didn’t have the luxury of time to do so. And I like staying in Korea over another country anyway.’

It’s interesting.

I didn't know there were national institutions, but to realize they are scouting examinees in fierce competition like a pro soccer team.

3rd, 4th, 5th...

If I can continue surviving the exams and keep getting stronger, other state institutions will offer money and try to scout me as well.

Imagining lots of countries coming to me with bags of money, competing with each other, trying to win me over, just thinking about it makes me feel incredibly good.

Of course, it's all relative only if I can survive.

Zing, zing.

My smartphone rings. Unknown caller ID. Its Kang Chun-seong.

"Hello?"

-I am at Cheonan station.

"Come towards my house. I'm at..."

I give Kang Chun-seong my home address.

After that I give a call to the research employee.

"He said he'll be right over."

"Understood. Then I will be waiting with the car up front."

"Yes, I am heading out now."

I change my clothes and go out and in front of the apartment entrance is parked an Equus car*. Oh, it's a surprisingly nice car. But still, they are a state institution so they're using a state car.

(TN: A Hyundai Equus, a Korean car that I've never heard of.)

A guy looking to be in about his late 30's gets out of the car and introduces himself.

“Are you Mr. Kim Hyun-ho?”

“Yes, nice to meet you.”

“Please get in.”

He personally opens the back door. I feel like a VIP. A moment later, Kang Chun-seong joins us and sits next to me.

“We will depart.”



The guy takes the car and goes to a nearby army base and lets us off at the army's helipad. Not long after, a helicopter arrives making a strange noise.

The man points to the helicopter.

“Please get in.”

Where in the hell are we going?

I get a suspicious feeling but get into the helicopter with Kang Chun-seong. The helicopter takes off making a strange sound.

As this is my first time in a helicopter, I frantically check out the inside of the helicopter and gaze at the view below.

After all that, the place we arrive is a lonely and remote island off the west coast. It's a fairly large island and I can see two large 10-story buildings.

‘An island, I wonder if it's because it's an institution that cannot be revealed?’

After getting off the helicopter, we are guided by an employee and make our way into the building.

“Oppa!”

“Hyun-ho hyung!”

We arrive at a room kind of like a waiting room and Hye-su and Joon-ho heartily welcome us.

“Did you guys arrive by helicopter too?”

“Yes.”

“I was a bit freaked out. They said to just get on the helicopter so I thought where in the world are they taking me.”

I can see it. It’s almost like getting kidnapped.

I was less scared because I at least came with Kang Chun-seong. If they tried something funny, he would’ve KO’ed them all. Haha.

It happens when the four of us are gathered in the waiting room talking about this and that.

“You have arrived.”

Cha Ji-hye appears.

Today she is wearing a dark gray suit with a white sweater and brown ankle boots. Her walk is like usual, step, step, fearlessly intentional.

“Nice to meet you, I am Cha Ji-hye. From now on I will be your team’s supervisor.”

“You mean, if we sign a contract?”

“Yes.”

At my words Cha Ji-hye lets out her special tiny smile.

“I am aware you have passed the second exam, how many days of the rest period are left?”

“14 days. Our exam finished yesterday.”

“You posted online as soon as your exam was over?”

“Yes.”

“You are indeed very prudent. It is a relief that you have more time remaining than I thought.”

Ah, seriously, why does my heart just fly away every time this woman gives me a compliment?

Maybe because I spent my youth as a person who never had a romantic relationship. Or is it just that a person like me is ever so weak towards beautiful women?

“I will give a brief explanation of the contract terms. Our Korean Arena Research Center firstly aids in all ways possible for your survival, regardless of individual skill or results.”

“You mean we get the same treatment as veteran examinees, without discrimination?”

I ask.

Cha Ji-hye nods her head.

“Yes. There are limits to the help we can give you anyway, and the result is ultimately based on your own competence.”

“That is true.”

“You have all only just yet passed the second exam and our hope is for all of you to safely pass and grow from the next exam. Thus, more so than gaining majeong, our plan is to focus on survival.”

“If we do bring back majeong, how much will we get?”

“The compensation for majeong is dependent on the majeong energy concentration level. This compensation is without discrimination from other examinees and is the same for all examinees. Any difference will be in annual salary only.”

“How much salary can we get?”

“The salary is not dependent on results and is an amount basically for livelihood guarantee, but to determine that amount we must know how strong each of you are.”

“You mean you want to verify our skill levels and equipment?”

“Yes.”

“So in the end, before we sign a contract, we have to reveal all our information. Isn’t this a contract that is too unfair to us? We were unable to contact other country research centers so we don’t know what an average salary for this kind of contract is at all.”

“In those regards we have nothing to say except to trust in us. If we are to continue having a good relationship with our examinees, we have to treat you properly. If we do not, we lose talented people to other countries.”

“Hmm...”

I have a feeling I can trust this woman. Ah, have I been ensnared by a beautiful woman?

After my thinking, I speak.

“For now, I will contract for a year.”

“You say 1 year?”

“Yes, one year for now and if we can build adequate trust then I will extend the contract.”

“Hmm, okay. The salary can always be recalculated based on your teams’ skills. We are receiving government aid as well so you will not be disappointed there.”

I look around at the others. Lee Hye-su, Lee Joon-ho, Kang Chun-seong, all three nod their heads.

I talk to Cha Ji-hye.

“Okay.”

Cha Ji-hye takes out pen and papers from her briefcase and distributes it to us.

“Please write down all your skills and items and karma. With that as our basis, we will determine your salaries.”

We begin writing down on our papers.

Spirit summon entry level 1, magic rifle gun, bandolier, 900 karma.

Cha Ji-hye looks at what I wrote and is surprised and asks me.

“Spirit summon?”

“Is something wrong?”

“No, that is not it. I just haven’t heard of an examinee with a spirit summons.”

“Is it that special?”

“Yes, any examinee with better skills gets known throughout the facility, but there has never been an examinee with a spirit summons as their main skill. The rarer the skill, your better you contract terms will be.”

“That’s a relief.”

“But, is that 900 karma you wrote mistaken writing?”

“No. 900 karma is correct.”

Cha Ji-hye’s face is overcome with surprise all the more.

“You mean to say you earned 900 karma in the second exam?”

“Yes, well the angel bastard said it was the best record ever, but is that true?”

“Yes, yes. It is difficult to even get that much in the fifth exam. You are incredible.”

Seeing her amazed face makes me feel good. To be treated as a mister capable, in my shoes, an experience I never had in my 29 years.

Without much more to write, Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su turn in their papers. Cha Ji-hye reads them and doesn’t really show a response, but is surprised again at Kang Chun-seong’s.

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong, have you provided false information?”

“I did not.”

“For a 2nd turn examinee to have aura control entry level 4 and physical strength buff intermediate level 1 is, from a common sense approach, impossible...”

“So?”

Kang Chun-seong’s expression becomes menacing.

I quickly intervene.

“He’s originally a really skilled martial artist.”

“...understood. Anyway, I will return after evaluation. It will not take long so please wait a moment.”

Cha Ji-hye takes the papers she received from us into her briefcase and leaves us.

“Hyung, how much do you think we’ll get?”

“I don’t care about the money. I’m satisfied with them just helping me survive.”

It’s a greedless hope befitting a girl from a rich family, Lee Hye-su.

“True. Let’s not get too greedy for now. Like they said, for now, our priority is survival. Seeing how properly they’re set up, they will be a big help.”

Cha Ji-hye knows more way more about the Arena than we do. She has the full map of the Arena so she must possess immense knowledge.

The evaluation is really fast.

Cha Ji-hye returns after not even 30 minutes and passes out four contracts to us.

“You may read it and then sign. To sum up, the contract is for one year, the salary for Kim Hyun-ho and Kang Chun-seong is \$60,000, for the other two people, \$30,000.

“60k?”

I’m completely surprised. It’s a salary much higher than I expected.

Cha Ji-hye speaks to a very surprised me.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you received a high salary due to advancing in your very rare skill, the spirit summons, and for being the team leader, and Kang Chun-seong was definitely evaluated at 60k for already having the strength of a 5th, 6th turn examinee.”

“Then is there a mandatory requirement we have to fulfill?”

“You must use your karma after consulting with your research team manager, and any majeong you get in the Arena must be sold to us, and abide by training times, there are no other requirements.”

“Sounds good.”

I read the contract and Cha Ji-hye’s words are not wrong.

After my lead, everyone signs.

And so we concluded on the contracts.

“I congratulate you on becoming assigned examinees with the Korean Arena Research Center. I am everyone’s research manager Cha Ji-hye. If anything comes up, you may come talk to me.”

“Thank you.”

“I look forward to it.”

We do a last formal farewell with Cha Ji-hye.

And so we start our full scale training for the exams.



The very first thing we do is an individual interview.

Cha Ji-hye calls us one by one and listens to our detailed accounts of our past exams. She asks for full and detailed descriptions of how we passed the first and second exams.

It is with the intent of determining our tendencies and fighting style.

As the leader, I go in first for the interview.

I reveal everything truthfully including Park Go-chan's death.

I did not think I would need to hide it.

"I will sum up. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho, you eliminated an examinee that tried to rape a comrade and murdered the red ape leader. Is this correct?"

"Yes."

She nods her head.

"Very good. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho, you are far more capable than I thought you were. On top of it, you have a teammate like Kang Chun-seong, so your team has a good chance of long term survival."

"Thank you. But about Park Go-chan's death..."

"Do not worry. There is no evidence for punishment for what happened in the Arena and you had a very clear and appropriate measures. There are many teams that had collapsed teamwork because of people like him."

Only then did the burden on my soul of Park Go-chan's death get lifted.

Chapter 28

Korean Arena Research Center (Part 2)

(TN: So I did some research (Wikipedia) and found that the average disposable income of Korea in 2014 was \$30,000. So his salary of \$60,000 is actually pretty good. Keep in mind that stuff in Korea is pretty cheap as well.)

After the individual interviews followed a physical stress test. Cha Ji-hye suggested to each of us an appropriate karma prize.

“Thankfully, Kim Hyun-ho, your physical condition is that of a healthy adult male level.”

“That’s, that’s a relief.”

I had no confidence in my crap physique, so I let out a sigh of relief. It seems hiking every day made a difference.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, I advise you spend 600 karma to get the entry level 4 physical strength buff. Physical health is of utmost importance so please refer to it.”

She shows me a paper.

-Physical strength buff (secondary skill)

-Entry level 1: will earn physique of a healthy adult male. (-100)

-Entry level 2: will earn physique of an athletic adult male. (-150)

-Entry level 3: will earn physique of a trained soldier. (-200)

-Entry level 4: will earn physique of specially trained marine. (-250)

-Entry level 5: will earn physique that reinforces/strengthens to the limits of the human body. (-300)

It is as Kang Chun-seong said, getting to the intermediate levels surpasses human limitations.

"Entry level 4 will give me the physique of a specially trained marine?"

"Indeed."

"Without any difficult training, just for free?!"

"It is free. There is of course, a need to acclimate yourself to your suddenly increased physique."

I summon my board and pick my karma prize and select the physical strength buff.

-Physical strength buff (secondary skill): strengthens physique.

*Entry level 2: will earn the physique of an athletic adult male. (-150)

"I select physical strength buff to entry level 4."

As I say so, the words on the board change.

-Physical strength buff to entry level 4 will use 600 karma. Will you select?

-Remaining karma: +900

"Select."

Padt!

A light appears from the board and that light penetrates my body. I can feel my entire body squirming and I can feel it changing.

"Huh?!"

"There is no need to be alarmed. Your body is changing with the skill."

Like molding clay, my body was changing, squirming on its own.

My soft belly disappears and my arms and legs get firm. In place of the disappeared

belly fat, something hard starts to take shape.

About a minute passes.

The change is complete.

“Wow!”

I see my own body and am completely surprised. Were my pecs this great?

I pull up my sleeve and the muscles in my arm are developed in minute detail. I lift up my shirt and check my middle.

“This, this is!”

That legendary six pack! Not only the withered arms and legs, but the unappealing and dangling lower belly fat I had was nowhere to be seen.

Not only that.

Shoulders! Legs too!

Not just healthy muscle, but I now had muscles so fine they looked chiseled into me.

“Are you done?”

I was so excited looking at my body and I ask Cha Ji-hye a question. I come to my senses and scratch my head.

“This really is an amazing skill.”

“Not only physical strength, but your muscle endurance and stamina will have greatly improved.”

“I really like this. So, how should I spend the rest of my karma?”

“There is a secondary skill you must learn with 100 karma.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a skill called a guider. You can check it on your board.”

I verify the skill called guider on my board.

-Guider (secondary skill): gain a 6th sense to find your destination and location.

*Entry level 1: vaguely find the direction. (-100)

Was there a skill like this?

“It’s a skill that at least one person per team needs to know. Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you are the leader and you can scout with Sylph so together with this skill, you can make good use of it together.”

“Understood.”

I consent and select this skill too. And so 100 karma was used and I was left with 200 karma.

“So I’ve got my secondary skill, but do I not need to raise my spirit summon skill?”

“Even if you raise your main skill one or two levels, it doesn’t make that much difference compared to level one. For right now, raising your secondary skills will make the most difference. Most of all, a strong physical and a strong sense of direction is the most important.”

“Understood.”

I decide to trust Cha Ji-hye, who is a specialist.

“How should I use my 200 remaining karma?”

“That, we need to experiment with another specialist and we need a bit more time.”

“Experiment?”

“We are looking for the best choice, so trust us and wait.”

“Alright, I will.”

“Also, take this book.”

Cha Ji-hye hands me a very thick book.

“It is a comprehensive informational book on the Arena. Please read all of it.”

“Ok. And when does the training begin?”

“At this time, you don’t require any training.”

“Huh?”

There is no training needed?

Cha Ji-hye speaks to a doubtful me.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you do not have a part that requires improvement with short training immediately. You were able to survive on your own and your aim is 100 out of 100 without even looking at the target and you’ve mastered the uses of your spirit summon very well.”

“...”

“Of course, if we come up with another idea on how you can use your spirit summon, we will suggest it to you right away. But for now, resting for the 14 days is best.”

“Is that the same for the other team members?”

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong does not have a need for training either. His combat fighting was actually to the point that our martial arts team needed to learn from him.”

“Well yeah...”

That man was originally strong like a monster and with his martial arts skill, isn’t he complete already?

“But Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su will stay here and receive training for the 14 days.”

“Here?”

"Yes. The two people have major deficiency in their skills and require special training. Of course for the 1-2 days before the exam, we give them time to rest and recuperate."

I worry for Hye-su. She only has one sword and 150 karma. How much stronger can she get with special training?

"So can Kang Chun-seong and I just go home?"

"Mr. Kang Chun-seong does not have a place to go so he has decided to stay here. We can escort you with a helicopter and vehicle to your place"



I took the helicopter and rode the Eqqus and by the time I got home, it was 7 pm. I returned and took a shower and again, was overcome with awe and happiness when checking out my own body. If Hyun-ji sees, she'll be so surprised. She always teased me saying she doesn't like to see anchovies.* I shall astonish her with this oppa's chocolate abs.* ... actually that seems kind of perverted so I won't. What kind of bizarre thing would that be to do to a younger sister?

(TN: because anchovies are skinny and weak like he used to be.)

(TN: as in his abs look like the squares on a bar of chocolate)

After finish my shower, I still find my abs to be so lovable that I go around my house without a shirt on. I giggle and smile in front of the full body mirror and put on just jeans and assume some model poses. Ahh I am happy.

'I should test out how much better this is.'

First, I lightly do some pushups.

'A thousand. I think I can do a thousand!'

I am no longer panting for air after 50. I get in a handstand position and try to do a pushup. Even this works! Is that all? I succeed in doing pushups with just both thumbs.

"Sylph. Aren't I cool?"

-Meow!

This cute thing just nods her head and is full of aegyo.

Indeed, even the spirit has eyes to see.

Yes, of course. I am sure she didn't just agree simply because I am her owner. I am greatly satisfied. My body was firm.

'Marines with special training gained this body through training alone? They're really respectable.'

I almost feel like a thief for having gotten this body for free. It was while I was exercising, not realized time passing by.

Beep beep beep-

With a sound of the password being put in, the front door opens.

"Son. I'm home!"

'Oh, its mom.'

I quickly put on a top.

"Did you sell a lot of fried chicken?"

"No..."

"Huh? Are you slowing starting to fail?"*

(TN: The word he uses means to fail, as in a business failing, not fail as in a person failing)

"Business hours aren't even over, but we ran out of ingredients. I'm so upset."

"...still on fire. It comforts me as your heir."

"Haha son, you should hurry and come out to work at the store soon."

"Starting next month."

Now that I think of it, I am no longer unemployed. I am now a high earner earning 60k as an annual salary. But how to explain this?

'My mom will be so upset if I tell her I can't work at the store because I've gotten employed.'

Mom was so excited, looking forward to spending time with her son at the store.

She'll be sad again if I disappear again with a job.

'I'll keep it a secret for now.'

I decide to solve this problem after the 3rd exam. A moment later, noona gets home. She must have dropped off mom and then gone to park the car.

As soon as she gets into the house, with a sharp eye, she looks around the house.

"Where's Hyun-ji?"

"Not here."

Now that I look, it is 10 pm and Hyun-ji hasn't come home.

"She hasn't answered her phone either."

No way?

"Is she at the club again?"

Mom asks a straightforward question.

As she asked, noona's gaze become a level colder.

"A TOEIC 400-er is at the club at this house?"

A TOEIC score of 400? I almost puke up blood.

That's the specs on a college student about to graduate?

(TN: From Wikipedia: The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC)

is “an English language test designed specifically to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment.” Basically, a test you take that employers will check. This is out of 990 in Korea.)

The 33 year old spinster lawyer rages with fire and looks at me.

“Kim Hyun-ho!”

“Wh-wha-why?”

I feel as if her icy gaze is shattering through my heart.

“Go out and find her right now.”

“Where am I supposed to find her?”

“Find her, unemployed.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Like a reflex, formal speech that I don’t even use with my mom just comes out of my mouth. I quickly put on a jacket and run out of the house.

I leave the apartment in the dead of night and I feel at a loss for what to do. Hyun-ji is definitely playing like crazy right now, I’m sure.

‘She has her phone off, that means she’s either at a club or a night club. It’s a weekday and going out to play after school means she hasn’t gone to Gangnam or Hongdae.’

There is only one club in Cheonan, but lots of night clubs.

(TN: A night club is somewhere you go and you get checked into a booth by an attendant and it usually has alcohol. A club is one where you walk in and get your own stuff/spot. There is more music and dancing and it has less alcohol.)

How am I to know which one Hyun-ji is at...

‘Huh?’

Suddenly I get a weird feeling. I sense that if I go to the right, for some reason, I will be

able to find Hyun-ji.

I come to think of the secondary skill, guider, that I got today.

'Yeah. With this skill, I'll be able to find her!'

It is just a vague direction only, but with this skill and a map app, I think it'll be possible.

I take out my smart phone, open the map app, and look up clubs and night clubs in Cheonan. In the direction of my 6th sense, there is only one located. Thankfully, it is close to here.

'Ok. Just you wait Hyun-ji.'

I grab a taxi and head towards the club.



As I arrive at the club, I can sense that Hyun-ji is inside.

'This is it'

I get out of the taxi and head for the club.

I had just thrown on my clothes, but because it's a weekday, without much ado, I am able to get into the club.

There is a loud electronic music attacking my eardrums. That DJ bastard must be a hearing impaired person.

There aren't as many people dancing as I thought.

I scan the crowd and I can't see Hyun-ji. Just full of fricking dudes.

'Perhaps this way?'

The guider skill guides me to the left.

It's an area where rooms are clustered together. Maybe... but is she drinking with guys

in one of these rooms?

“This TOEIC 400 scorer!”

I briskly walk over in that direction.

I look around and I get a strong sense from one of the rooms.

“This is it.”

I open the door and go inside.

The guy and girl’s gaze from inside the room tilt over to me. Boys 3, girls 3. Among them, of course, is Hyun-ji.

“Oh. Op... oppa?”

Hyun-ji’s two eyes become round like a rabbit.

“Let’s go, you thing.”

“How did you know to come here?”

“Noona sent me here, that’s why I came.”

“Un... unni?”

Hyun-ji’s voice starts to shake in fear.

“Who’s this?”

“Must be Hyun-ji’s oppa.”

The girls start to whisper and the men, with blank expressions of their faces, gaze back and forth between me and Hyun-ji.

I sigh and gesture.

“Hurry up and let’s go. How could you think to come to a club with your TOEIC score?”

“Heeeee...”

“
...”

Hyun-ji has a tearful face on and gets out of her seat. She grabs her bag and obediently comes out. She must find noona to be scary.

Chapter 29

Girls (Part 1)

“I’ll go first.”

Hyun-ji grabs her bag and gets up from her seat.

“Hey. Where are you going? Stay and play some more.”

The guy that was sitting next to her with dyed blond hair suddenly grabs her wrist and pulls.

At that, Hyun-ji falls back into her seat, giggling and tries to get back up.

“No, I have to go now.”

“No. Don’t go.”

The guy is trying to be cute and joke but grabs Hyun-ji’s wrist tightly and won’t let go.

Hyun-ji had laughed with him, thinking it was a joke, but her face grows confused.

‘What is this now?’

I speak politely to the guy.

“I’m sorry for crashing the atmosphere, but we have no choice due to family circumstances right now.”

“Eyyyy what circumstance? We were in the middle of having fun and it’s not like your little sister is a kid either.”

“We have a situation. I’ll be taking Hyun-ji and leaving now. Please let go of her hand.”

“I wish I could...”

The blonde guy lifts up the hand holding Hyun-ji's hand up high.

"The hand won't come apart, it's strange."

"Hahaha."

"Ah you idiot."

His friends think it's funny and laugh.

Funny? This isn't a joke.

"Please let go."

Flustered Hyun-ji tries to shake his hand off but the man doesn't let go.

The atmosphere continues to grow chilly.

'Ahh seriously...'

Park Go-chan was like this too and at this point, I grow curious. Do I look like the type that can be easily taken advantage of?

Why does everyone quarrel with me without a care in the world, assuming that I will be flustered and not know what to do?

"Why doesn't hyung-nim just drink and play with us? Huh?"

Then the blonde bastard lifts up a beer.

At that moment.

Kwok! (hitting sound)

"Kuk!"

Without restraint, I extend my hand and grab his neck.

"Will your hand let go now?"

“Kuuk! Kuuk!”

“You wanna sit me down next to my younger sister and play? You wanna die?”

Alright. This bastard saw me correctly. I was not the kind of person that could use violence without hesitation. Up to a while ago, I really was like that.

But then I killed tens of hundreds of red apes and disposed of Park Go-chan’s body and the me of my past is gone.

‘Now do you realize that you are not the average person? That you are actually a very special kind of person?’

I don’t know, fuck.

That doesn’t sound like a compliment. I’m saying that this me, where I feel like I could smash his neck and kill him, I don’t like it.

“Oppa!”

“Hyun-ji. You go out.”

“O... ok.”

Now that her hand is free, Hyun-ji quickly heads outside.

“I’m gonna go too.”

“I’m gonna go with you.”

Hyun-ji’s two friends frantically grab their bags and get up.

“Let go of that hand!”

A friend of the blonde guy gets up and yells.

After Hyun-ji and her friends all leave, only then do I let go of the guy’s neck. He gags and tries to catch his breath, this blonde bastard.

His two friends stare at me with intimidating eyes.

I speak.

"I'm sorry about that, but your friends joke was a bit too much. I apologize again. Have a fun night."

I bend at my waist and respectfully say goodbye and quickly get out of the room.

Well, I understand. They spent a lot of money to get a room and were playing and I just barged in and ruined the good atmosphere. Who would like that? Not to mention, today's club is a sausage fest.

Just seeing the few girls that were in there, Hyun-ji and her friends were on the high end.

But still, he can't be beaming and smiling in front of a girl's real oppa.

Hyun-ji and her friends were waiting outside the room.

"Let's go."

"Ok..."

I take the downcast Hyun-ji and start to leave the club.

And then.

"Where are you going you shit?"

'Huh?'

I look behind me and that blonde bastard has jumped out and is huffing and puffing and glaring at me.

Aww I just want to brush him off as a jerk, but in his hand, he is holding an empty alcohol bottle.

"I said where are you going!"

The blonde guy with bottle in hand briskly walks towards me.

“Oooppa!”

“Oh my gosh!”

Hyun-ji and her friends are terrified. The gaze of the people around us start to focus in on us.

What if we end up going to the police station?

The blonde guy gets close. My right hand moves like a reflex. With the tip of my hand, I brush off the bottle that the guy is holding.

Pasak!

Surprising, the bottle is completely shattered except for the neck that the guy was holding on to.

“...?!!”

The blonde bastard freezes like ice.

‘Me. I’m surprised too!’

Momentarily, strength flooded my body and without even knowing, I had tried using it. I thought perhaps it was possible and I really did it!

‘It said the physique of a marine, and it was true!’

Things like this are possible too. I am admiring the strength of the physical strength buff entry level 4.

“Why? Got something else?”

At my question, the blonde bastard, with an idiotic expression, shakes his head back and forth. He’s finally caught on that I am not an opponent that he should fight.

Eventually, the fight was concluded and we left the club.

“Oppa, I’m sorry...”

Hyun-ji is totally about to cry. Even so, she's holding on tightly to my sleeve and seeing this kind of behavior, she was born with aegyo.

Without the energy to get mad at her, I just sigh.

"It's alright. Like the guy said, you're not a kid either. Who you hang out with and play with, I don't think it's a place for me to interfere."

"No oppa, please done misconstrue it. While playing here, I've never been in a situation like that."

At Hyun-ji protesting her accusation, her friends offer up their words.

"It's true. The people we usually hang out with have good manners."

"They were so insistent, we were just talking with them..."

I gesture with my hand.

"That's fine. Anyway, why did you turn off your phone? We couldn't contact you and were worried. You should've called saying you were late."

"Hing (whining sound) If I say I'll be out playing, unni doesn't let me."

"Why do you need noona's permission? Not like you ever listened well anyway."

"Lately, I've been getting my allowance from unni..."

"Huh?"

"Umma says she is now preparing for old age, so unni is going to be responsible for me now. The credit card that I carry is unni's."

"Ohhhh..."

I get the gist of it. The only person that can control our rein-less fowl, Hyun-ji, is noona. That's why noona took the reins from umma and started personally overseeing it.

"Whew. You 400-er."

“What is a 400-er?”

“It’s your TOEIC score you.”

Hyun-ji’s face becomes awfully distorted. Her friends began to giggle and laugh.

“Aww what? That’s so embarrassing!”

“You know what embarrassed is?”

“Oh yeah. Like what was your TOEIC score?”

“...650.”

“Oh my. So high! I respect you! What’s your secret? You must be an industrial spy!”

“Better than 400! The score is 400, are you going to yell at your human resources manager? Were you just going to meaninglessly talk at your interview?”

At Hyun-ji’s and my bickering, her friends were laughing like crazy. And so the awkward atmosphere that came about from the fight disappeared.

As the atmosphere changed, one of her friends, with the long straight hair and impressionable double eyelids, a cute girl, asked a question.

“Anyway, oppa, did you learn martial arts?”

“Oh right! I was so surprised too. Oppa, how did you break that alcohol bottle?”

Hyun-ji claps her hands and asks me.

I scratch my head.

“Not martial arts, just exercise you know? I’m exercising hard these days.”

“I saw you going for a hike every day, but now that I see you, your body has strangely become good?”

Hyun-ji taps my shoulders and my chest in an interested manner.

"A while ago, you weren't like this. Does exercise usually show results this fast?"

"Well, it's not like I had anything else to do. All day I just exercised. I was surprised I could break that bottle too. Must have just been coincidence."

"You must have really exercised a lot. Oppa, show me the abs. Abs!"

Gasp. The girl with the long straight hair and double eyelids twinkles her eyes and asks me.

"Oh. Uh... I can't. I don't have abs and things like that."

"Huh? Nuh-uh. You've got abs? since when?"

Hyun-ji is poking my belly.

I feel like a lamb surrounded by carnivore females. They're scary!

"Hee hee anyway, I see you in a different light now oppa. I had no idea you had a side like that. Turns you you're really brave."

Hyun-ji wraps her arm in my and shows aegyo. I brush her hair.

"Child, even if you act cute like this, today is your end. Noona is waiting for you."

You think I wouldn't know your intentions?

"Hiiinggg oppa don't be like that, keep it a secret. Can you just say I was with friends talking at a café? Huh?"

"Oh yeah, that will work real well while you're reeking of alcohol."

"Min-jeong! Perfume!"

Hyun-ji snaps her fingers and the double eyelid girl, called Min-jeong, quickly takes out perfume from her bag and sprays.

The smell of jasmine strongly stimulates my nose.

Hyun-ji spins round and round in front of the perfume and spreads her arms in a ta-

da.

“How is it? It doesn’t smell anymore, right?”

“The perfume smell is more suspicious.”

“Oh what?”

“You should just give up. Nothing will work with noona. So why did you have to go and turn off your phone?”

“I’m busy and kept getting calls. I thought I would get caught with the music so I was gonna say my battery died. Hing, I’m so dead.”

But then suddenly, the double eyelid girl shoves her face up to right up to mine and asks,

“Oppa, lets exchange phone numbers.”

“What?”

What out of the blue nonsense is this?

“Next time Hyun-ji turns off her phone and goes submarine, you can just call me. We always hang out together.”

“Oh should I? Then thanks.”

I hand over my smartphone to the double eyelid girl. She takes my smartphone and quickly begins to input her number. But then Hyun-ji, who has been seeing this all go down, starts to frown.

“Hey! You treacherous bitch. Stop”

“Why?”

“Who do you think you’re hitting on? Bad bad! Get away from my oppa. “

“Humph. What did I do?”

The double eyelid girl calls and then saves my number on her phone. Even with Hyun-ji's threats, she's very persistent.

I get my phone back and verify. And the friends name is 'Yoo Min-jeong ^^*' is how she input it. In the midst of all that, even with the emoticon, she has fast fingers.

Impressive persistence.

Wait. Have I been hit on?

A strange atmosphere has been made.

"Anyway, how are we gonna get home? All the taxis have stopped."

Another friend asks again

"Oh right. We can walk home but what about you guys?"

Hyun-ji looks worried too.

Min-jeong sighed.

"We were originally gonna spend the whole night playing here and then take the first taxi back."

"I'll be on my way. You guys should just keep playing."

At this, her friends strongly disapprove.

"Nah. I don't even wanna go clubs anymore."

"What if we meet those guys again? We'll just have to grab a taxi and go."

I began to feel guilty. If it wasn't for me, they'd all be having a fun time. But of course, I can't stand to watch my younger sister get picked up by that asshole blondie bastard!

"It's my fault so I'll pick up the taxi fee."

"Huh? Oh no."

“It’s ok...”

But then I take out my wallet and open it up and begin a cold sweat. Where did it go?

My four \$10 bills.

‘Huk! Right! Kang Chun-seong!’

Only then did I remember that I had given all my cash to Kang Chun-seong. I’m flustered and frozen like a stone statue and Hyun-ji comes over slowly. She pokes me in the side with her elbow and quietly asks me

“Hey sir.”

“...”

“You didn’t by chance open your wallet and find that you have no money, you unemployed oppa?”

“...”

“Wow this is so embarrassing!”

Hyun-ji laughs hysterically.

Her friends cover their mouths and laugh along.

Amidst the carnivorous girls, bent over in laughter, I am so flustered that I can’t raise my head. This isn’t right. This isn’t it! I could’ve finished off looking so much more cooler!

...in the end, her friends paid with their money to grab a taxi and go home.

I return home with the still laughing and teasing Hyun-ji.

But Hyun-ji had to pay her proper dues down on her knees in front of noona.

“Starting next month, I’m lowering the credit card limit to \$300.”

“Hinggg.”

“It is until you raise your TOEIC score to at least 800 at least.”

That is not something that is possible with Hyun-ji’s head.

Chapter 30

Girls (Part 2)

The next morning, I get up as soon as I open my eyes. My upper body bounces up like rubber and surprises even me.

'Oh right. I am now a man with abs hahaha.'

I pet my well chiseled 6 pack and giggle. I may become a narcissist this way. I pick up my phone to check the time and there is a message on it

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, are you up?]

Oh, it's Hyun-ji's friend Min-jeong.

I send a reply.

[Me: I just woke up.]

I wash my face and brush my teeth and come out to the hall. My phone vibrates again so I check it.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Thanks to oppa, I got home safely last night.]

I like her prompt replies. Girls nowadays always purposefully reply late.

I send her an immediate response.

[Me: Don't mention it, it's not like I paid your taxi fee]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahaha you must've been embarrassed]

[Me: A completely empty wallet and three girls giggling, it'll remain a life-long trauma]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahaha I'm sorry. Anyway, as thanks for saving us last night, I'll buy you a meal]

[Me: You'll buy?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Yes, yes]

[Me: Because you think I don't have money...]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: No haha then oppa can buy.]

[Me: I don't have any money]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahahahahahahaha]

We spent a good while giggling and chatting when it happened.

'Murder?!"

I get a wave of chilly air and turn around Hyun-ji is glaring at me.

"You uh, didn't go to school?"

"Today is a holiday."

"Yeah? Anyway, what're you looking at?"

"Give it."

"...what?"

"Give me your phone."

"Let's respect privacy amongst family members."

"Were you respecting my privacy when you barged into the club and dragged me out?"

"That was because noona made me and I had no choice."

"Oh whatever, hurry up and hand it over!"

Hyun-ji speedily snatches up my smartphone. She's faster than a red ape!

Hyun-ji sees the chatting history on my smartphone screen and starts to shake in boiling rage. Then...

“Mom! Oppa’s been tripped by an evil wench!”

She goes and tattles on me to mom, who is getting ready to leave for the store.

Stop!

At Hyun-ji’s words, mom turns her head.

“Wench? What do you mean?”

“She’s my friend, but oppa is completely fallen for her.”

She’s calling her own friend a wench. What kind of friendship is that?’

“Oh my.”

Mom’s face is overcome in anticipation and claps her hands.

“Evil wench or whatnot, are you saying there’s a girl for my son? Can I expect a grandchild then?”

“What peaceful nonsense is that! If a romance newbie guy like oppa gets caught by a girl like her she’ll just dangle him up and down and play with him and suck up his entire soul!”

Don’t call me a romance newbie! I am not a newbie! Even though I’m pretty close to it!

“No matter how much he’s dangled, I’ll be happy as long as I get a grandchild.”

My mom is definitely unusual.

“Wow, seriously mom!”

Hyun-ji kicks her feet in protest.

I use that moment to reclaim my smartphone from Hyun-ji’s hands.

And then I giggle again and restart the chat.

[Me: Hyun-ji is badmouthing. She says if it goes wrong I can even get my soul sucked up.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Haha so funny. But oppa, do you know?]

[Me: What?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: It's not entirely wrong.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Going stir crazy cuz of missing me, treading carefully in case I'm mad, getting so happy when I do a small thing, if you date me, that's how it always goes.]

[Me: ;;;]

(TN: ;;; is a sweating emoticon... I think.)

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: How much must I be liked for that to happen?]

How much...

At those words I flinch like a daggers been driven through my heart.

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Would oppa like to be like that?]

'Ku huk!'

A direct hit. A dead center fastball strike. Aside from being so taken aback, I cannot get a sense of how to reply at all.

And then.

[Notice: Mr./Ms. Hyun-ji has invited you to a chat room.]

[Notice: Mr./Ms. Hyun-ji has invited Mr./Ms. 'Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}' to the chat room.]

Hyun-ji has invited us to a group chat room.

[Hyun-ji: You, Min-jeong.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: What^^?]

[Hyun-ji: I have a video of you when you were freaking out at the club from last time, shall we all watch, okay?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Gasp;;]

[Hyun-ji: You weren't messing around then were you?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Sorry T_T]

[Hyun-ji: With a top off and pole dancing]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: I'm so sorry! ;;;]

[Hyun-ji: stop behaving frivolously]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: T_T]

I wonder what kind of video it is. Just how crazy were they partying?

In my head all kinds of thoughts run through, and then the chatting is done. I wonder if this short something with Yoo Min-jeong is over.

Zing.

A short buzz.

I check my smartphone.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, you know you haven't replied yet? I'll be waiting. Shh, it's a secret from Hyun-ji!]

Woah, I can understand why Hyun-ji got all up in arms about it now.

I thought she might have surrendered at Hyun-ji's warning, but she just brushed it off and immediately sent me a text. I can sense the attitude of this unhesitatingly forward carnivorous girl.

After a long while I send a reply.

[Me: I want to see]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Me?]

[Me: pole dance]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahaha]

[Me: Hahaha]

Ah, this is fun. Things like this. Thanks to it I started my day off enjoyably.

I got a great body in one morning but I don't give in to laziness and go on a hike. I am of the mind that if my body is lazy, my mind will become lazy too, so I will exercise consistently.

'There are people like Kang Chun-seong.'

A martial artist who trained his body to an entry level 5 degree through pure effort.

My body now is impressive, but how much work did Kang Chun-seong do over all his life?

A person like that acknowledged me as his leader. And so as the leader, in front of him, I have to at least not show a pathetic me.

'It is not a strength I got through work, so I should work even harder.'

After my hike, my mood is lifted by quite a bit. Without any strain, I got to the peak and down. It felt like just a stroll.

'But I should still work until it is hard.'

I think in order to get past a difficult situation, I have to work out hard and lengthen my endurance.

I don't really know any exercises so I just spent the time doing push-ups.

I get a phone call from Cha Ji-hye.

-Hello, this is Cha Ji-hye.

“Yes, hi.”

-Are you getting used to your changed body?

“I’m going to try and find where the limit is. I finished a hike and now I’m exercising.”

-That is a good idea. Resting is good but please consistently exercise.

“I will. Why did you call?”

-We have concluded on how we should use your remaining 200 karma.

“Oh right, you said you needed to experiment last time?”

-Yes. We succeeded in the experiment. With exactly 200 karma is a rifle item.”

“Rifle? Item?”

-An itemized gun from our world has better performance and quality than the karma kind.

“I suppose so, the magic rifle I have only has a shot distance of 60 meters...”

-Would you like to come to the research center tomorrow and experiment with the rifles and make a decision?

“Yes, alright. Will I be picked up this time too?”

-Yes. We will escort you via car and helicopter. The research center is a secured facility so you cannot find it on your own.

“Okay. I will see you tomorrow.”

-Yes.

I finish the call.

A rifle...

The muzzle loading magic rifle I currently have only has a shooting range of 60 meters, and every shot, I have to load a bullet into the chamber.

But if it's a rifle from our world?

I have a 100% shot record through Sylph, and what if I am given a rifle with a shot range of 500 meters?

'I could really be unstoppable.'

I can scout the surrounding 1 kilometer with Sylph and every time something comes within range, I'll shoot to kill!

Just thinking about it makes me feel stronger and gives me sense of security.



The next day, I arrive at the research center located on an isolated island off the western coast, via car and helicopter.

"Please come this way."

As soon as I arrive, Cha Ji-hye guides me. How shall I say, she seems a bit excited. It seems she really wants to show me the results.

We take the elevator to the 5th floor basement.

The place we arrive, five stories underground, is a shooting range.

'Expansive!'

It's a basement space bigger than the average school field! Along the lined up targets are marked 50 meters, 100 meters, 250 meters.

"It's very large."

"It's a gun range, expected to be used for training, so of course."

She speaks matter-of-factly. This woman's speech is short, as usual. She may never shed her soldier demeanor.

"First, take a look at this gun."

Cha Ji-hye goes into a closet marked 'weapons' and comes out with two rifles. Of the two, she hands me one.

It's a very classic rifle, with its butt done in wood.

"It's a rifle I've seen a lot in war movies."

"Indeed. Made in 1891, it's called a Mosin-Nagant, a rifle developed in the late 19th century."

"Mosin-Nagant?"

I take a close look at the Mosin-Nagant she handed to me.

The length looks to be just a bit over 1.2 meters, and I cannot see the magazine. Its classic style of its design makes me feel like the protagonist to a war movie.

(TN: Mosin-Nagant)

But this heavy weight. It can be an impressive blunt weapon on its own.

"And the magazine?"

"There is a five round magazine in the gun, and it fires with bolt action."

I've seen arms before and can tell by look at this.

With a bolt action, every time you shoot, the bolt gets pulled and an empty shell is removed.

"It's better than a muzzle loading gun but do you have any semiautomatics? I think this will be difficult close range."

"We have no choice. Among the existing rifles, this one uses the least karma."

"Then I have no choice. So you're saying this one is 200 karma?"

"No, it is 300 karma."

"What? Then why did you show this to me?"

"We experimented taking the 300 karma Mosin-Nagant and changing its worth into a 200 karma or lower."

"Is something like that possible?"

"Of course. We succeeded in our experiment, and this is the 200 karma Mosin-Nagant."

Cha Ji-hye shows me the other rifle that she was holding.

It's the same Mosin-Nagant.

'It doesn't like particularly any different.'

I put the butt of the rifle against my shoulder and get into shooting position. And then I am towards the target area from the 250-meter line...

'Huh?'

I then realize that something is different.

"It cannot aim."

"That is true, since we got rid of the front sight and back sight."

Indeed.

There is no front sight and back sight. There is no way to properly shoot without these things. In normal circumstances.

"A rifle that cannot properly shoot loses a lot of its worth. Not that you, Kim Hyun-ho, need to aim."

"Oh! There was this possibility!"

I realize it now.

They don't just call themselves a research center.

To think of an idea like this, I can tell they are really working for survival of the examinees.

"With that Mosin-Nagant, you can itemize it for 200 karma. Would you like to test its rifle performance?"

"Sure."

She hands me a clip with 5 bullets in it.

I take it and then don't know what to do and shrug my shoulders.

"Teach me. I have no clue."

"It's understandable since it was developed over 100 years ago."

I load the bullets and assume position as she teaches me.

"Sylph."

-Meow!

Sylph appears in a swish and gently sits down on my shoulder.

Cha Ji-hye sees the spirit for the first time and with an interested expression, is at a loss for words.

Chapter 31

What do you want me to do (Part 1)

“So cute.”

“What?”

“It’s nothing.”

It looks like Cha Ji-hye is flustered.

“Didn’t you just say something?”

“I didn’t say anything.”

With a business like tone, she cuts it off.

“...Well, alright.”

She definitely said something.

I reassume target position.

My shoulder, with the butt of the rifle pushed against it, is a little uncomfortable. It’s an unfamiliar gun and it feels awkward. I’m sure it’ll get more comfortable as I use it.

I take tentative aim from the 250-meter mark.

Sylph is sitting on my shoulder and she extends her front paw and ever so slightly adjusts the rifle.

-Meow.

It almost sounds like she’s telling me to shoot. Okay. I pull the trigger.

Tang-!!

A loud and piercing gunshot! The heavy recoil hits my shoulder hard.

"That was surprising."

If I didn't have the physical buffer entry level 4, my posture might have been shaken from the recoil. It's an incredible recoil. The target is hit and faints over backwards.

"How is it?"

"I was surprised cause the recoil was harder than I thought it would be."

"It uses a 7.62 mm bullet. It is definitely more powerful than the 5.56 mm you probably used in the army. Would you like to shoot more?"

"Yes."

"At 100, 150, and 250 meters, the targets will appear."

With that, Cha Ji-hye pushes a red button on the wall.

Bbik-

With a weird sound, the target practice starts.

At 100 meters, a black target stands up.

Tang!

Hit in the center and it falls over.

And then a target appears at 250 meters. Well, no problem.

Tang-

Without effort, the target falls backwards.

I shoot all 5 bullets and Cha Ji-hye hands me another clip with 5 bullets. Like I learned earlier, I load the clip and reshoot.

Tang! Tang! Tang!

How much am I shooting.

Click.

Huh? What noise is this?

I look behind me and Cha Ji-hye is holding a smartphone.

As I look at her with a confused face, she gets slightly flustered and tells me.

“We, we don’t have any information on spirits so with this opportunity, I would like to gather some, is it okay to keep filming?”

“Yes, of course.”

From then on she openly films Sylph with her smartphone, and her facial expression is happy-go-lucky like it was when she was at the café and ordered all those sweets.

...She must like Sylph. She could've just said so.

I whisper to Sylph.

“Want to assume a more cute position?”

-Meow.

From then on, Sylph changes into a cat model.

She wraps the rifle in her tail to aim, and acts cute hanging from the rifle like a koala bear. Click, click, the camera shots become more frequent. Seeing how she likes it, it makes me happy too. No girl hates a cat, yep.

Cha Ji-hye is all excited taking pictures when all of a sudden, she asks.

“I would like to ask one thing.”

“What is it?”

“Do you have to shoot the gun?”

“...What?”

“It doesn’t seem like there’s a reason for you to have to hold the gun.”

“Oh, uh...”

I become blank.

Yeah, why do I have to shoot?

Sylph aims for me anyway. I only decide where to shoot and when to pull the trigger.

“Sylph, you want to shoot?”

Sylph nods her head and takes over the Mosin-Nagant from me.

Cha Ji-hye rushes over and gives up a 5 bullet clip. But why is she respectfully give it with both hands? Sylph uses her tail to take the clip.

Click, click.

With skilled movements, she puts in the clip and aims. What, what, like a veteran soldier! Veteran cat warrior?

“Amazing...”

Without even realizing her thought came out her mouth, Cha Ji-hye is frantically taking pictures.

With adorable front paws and tail, Sylph lifts the Mosin-Nagant and aims. It’s a relatively seriously expression but even that is cute. The upgrade from puss in boots!

“Now, now start.”

Cha Ji-hye pushes the red button again.

The 150-meter target gets up.

Tang!

Sylph shoots without restraint.

100 meter, 250 meter, 250 meter, 150 meter. Sylph shoots them down as they get up. After shooting all 5 bullets, she swiftly changes another clip that Cha Ji-hye hands her and continues to shoot.

Tang!

The 250-meter target falls onto its back. It was extremely fast. The shooting speed and reloading speed were both way faster than me.

“She’s like Simo Häyhä.”

Cha Ji-hye has an enraptured expression on her face and mumbles.

“Who is that?”

“He is a sniper from Finland that shot 100 people in 542 days. Simo Häyhä’s rifle was a Mosin-Nagant as well.”

(TN: From Wiki: Simo “Simuna” Häyhä nicknamed “White Death” by the Red Army, was a Finnish marksman. Using a Finnish M/28-30 rifle (a Finnish variant of the Mosin–Nagant rifle) in the Winter War, he is reported as having killed 505 men, the highest recorded number of confirmed sniper kills in any major war.)

“Oh, I see.”

To be reminded of a monster sniper like that at seeing cute Sylph, I wonder if this woman has normal sensibilities.

But I get it, Sylph is the best shooter.

Without even the slightest delay, she shoot-shoots the targets down, never missing once!

-Meow?

Sylph turns back to look at me with a cute cry. She has a face asking me if she has to continue.

Click, click, its loud. Camera sounds.

-Meow!

Sylph returns the gun to me and sits gently atop my shoulder. A glimpse of disappointment passes by Cha Ji-hye's face.

She asks me, with her normal hard expression returned.

"How is the spirit summons consumed?"

"Hm, I don't know. I'll check."

I call on the board and check to see how much of Sylph's summons time is left.

"Compared to when I shoot, it uses more. It must be because she has to carry the gun and get rid of the recoil of the shot. But that being said, it isn't a huge difference."

"Then we don't really need you... I mean, I think there's no need for you to shoot."

"Just now you were almost about to say I'm not needed, huh?"

"No."

"Yes, you did."

"No."

"...Fine, let's say you didn't. But if Sylph holds the gun, when we fight, what will I do?"

At my question, Cha Ji-hye doesn't know what to say.

"Why aren't you saying anything?"

"Hm, couldn't you stand next to her and hold the bullets and take the role of handing her the bullets?"

"What is that!"

I say in my temper.

“Is there a problem?”

“Am I Sylph’s assistant?”

“You are the one that summons Sylph, so of course not.”

“It’s so, so pathetic!”

Sylph’s the marksmen and I’m the help? The role of holding bullets next to her while Sylph shoots the gun! My dead-shooter confidence collapses in a rush.

“What does it matter if you look a little insignificant?”

“So you acknowledge that it would look insignificant?”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

Cha Ji-hye has some thick skin.

“The fact that in a fight you are free is a big advantage.”

“What?”

“While Simo, I mean Sylph, shoots, you can fight the approaching enemy with your comrades. Remember, you did get the physical strength buff entry level 4.”

This woman, was she just about to call Sylph by Simo Häyhä?

“Besides the Mosin-Nagant I have the magic rifle, can I not use that?”

“I have something to say on that matter but first, won’t you come to the briefing with the other members?”

Now that I think of it, Kang Chun-seong, Joon-ho, and Hye-su, are all here.

“Sure.”



“Hyun-ho oppa!”

“Hyung!”

I go inside the meeting room and Hye-su and Joon-ho welcome me.

“How have you been? The training isn’t too bad?”

“Ah, it’s really hard.”

“Really? And you Hye-su? Hey? Hye-su?”

Hye-su’s expression was greatly shadowed.

“Are you okay?”

“My body...”

“Huh? What about your body?”

“We are getting such high level training to the point of overtaxing our bodies. Since we can go through the exam door with a hurt body...”

It's a good thought.

Once you pass through the exam door, your body becomes totally rejuvenated.

Because of it, they can train you extremely hard without worrying. For skill-less Hye-su to become useful in a short time, there's no other choice.

“It must be hard. But if you are to survive, there's no choice.”

“I know. I'm going to get through it.”

Hye-su looks at me and beams a smile.

“I can't get protected forever. I want to be a help to you too, Hyun-ho oppa.”

At that moment I almost embrace Hye-su. I barely stop myself!

Then the meeting door opens and Cha Ji-hye walks in.

“I am sorry I am late.”

Cha Ji-hye’s ambivalent expression is, oddly today, very flushed.

The reason is simple.

-Meow.

Sylph is sitting on top of her head.

She seemed to really like Sylph so I told Sylph to stay with her. As expected, she is completely excited because of Sylph.

“You’re a bit late?”

“I had a lot of things to gather.”

“Were you playing with Sylph?”

She slightly glares at me.

“No-no, of course not.”

Cha Ji-hye is totally surprised and mumbles.

‘They were playing.’

She probably excitedly took a bunch of selfies with Sylph.

“Uh-hm, anyway, from now on we are going to be doing a very important briefing so please pay attention.”

She turns on the notebook she brought and opens up the screen on the connected projector.

A large map appears on the screen.

It looks like an old-school map that was cumulatively drawn by hand, with odd proportions.

“This is Arena.”

“That?”

We are so surprised we stare at the map like a laser. Then again, there’s no satellites in Arena so the map must be crude. It must be a map made on the basis of examinees.

“Do you see the forest at the southwest corner of the map?”

The large land mass shows a forest at its southwestern edge.

“That forest is the location for where you will all be.”

“How can you know that?”

“Up to what has been revealed, there are two red ape habitats. Of the two, the large forest you all have mentioned is most likely that location.”

“Let’s say that we did our 1st and 2nd turns there, will we have the 3rd one in that forest?”

It’s Joon-ho’s question.

Cha Ji-hye nods her head.

“An exam’s start location is always the end location of the previous exam.”

“Then we will continue to do our exams in that forest then?”

At Joon-ho’s question, this time, Cha Ji-hye shakes her head.

“Look at this.”

The screen changes.

[Previous world examinees’ cumulative trends

1st turn: examinees talent/qualification test. Often starts in the wilderness, no humans.

2nd turn: a teamwork test with comrades.

3rd, 4th turn: move away from the wilderness, enter Arena's locals' society.]

"These are calculated trends based on shared logged data about this world. Looking at this, your 3rd turn exam moving away from the forest is a very high possibility."

They can make an educated guess in advance about the 3rd exam. It's like an aptitude test. This is the benefit of receiving aid from a state institution.

"If you look at the next page you can see more definitive data."

As the screen changes, the entirety of the Arena map zooms into the southwestern forest.

The forest is marked into districts.

[Arena SW forest area

Forest center: red ape habitat

Forest east: lycanthrope-infested area

Forest west: unidentified

Forest south: unidentified

Forest north: troll-infested area]

"You are all in the forest center and to get out of the forest, you will have to decide on either the east or north directions."

"So we have to decide between lycanthropes or trolls."

"Indeed. And we suggest going through the eastern lycanthrope-infested area."

"Why so?"

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you use guns well, but as much of a big advantage guns can be, their limits are just as clear. From now on, you will meet enemies you cannot combat with guns, and amongst them, are trolls.”

“...I guess the lycanthropes will be better.”

If the gun doesn't work, none of our teams' attacks will work. For now, our teams strongest attack method is the gun.

Chapter 32

What do you want me to do (Part 2)

The screen changes again.

[Lycanthrope characteristics]

1. Wolf human.
2. Acts as a group.
3. Has intelligence equal to humans.
4. Can change into a human, during its change, has command of human language.]

Another group behavior monster.

In an unfamiliar forest. We definitely experienced how hard it is being chased by a group that is familiar within that forest.

“Lycanthropes are much stronger than red apes and possess the olfactory and auditory capabilities equal to a wolf, the next turn will be much harder than the 2nd turn.”

‘Ugh.’

Smell and hearing like a wolf. It means it will move to pursue a lot quicker than the red apes.

“Of course, you have all become a lot stronger and there is a chance of winning, but there is one disadvantage.”

“You mean Hye-su?”

I say it.

“Yes.”

Hye-su is pricked and depresses her head. I tap Hye-su on the shoulder. I didn’t point it out to criticize her, I’m being realistic to find our weakness and a security plan for it.

“Lee Hye-su, with her 150 karma, used 100 to get the physical strength buff entry level 1 to reinforce her most problematic issue, physical inadequacy, and is taking a crash course training on sword wielding.”

Cha Ji-hye’s words continue.

“But still, it is true that she is still weaker than the rest of the team, and if one doesn’t contribute to the exam, the amount of karma that is earned dwindle that much more and it will become a vicious circle of the gap in skills getting bigger.”

“I’m thinking there’s no way around it, but is there any kind of security measure?”

I ask.

Cha Ji-hye nods her head.

“Kim Hyun-ho, would you transfer your magic gun to Lee Hye-su?”

“The magic gun to Hye-su? You want to have her fight with the gun?”

“No. It is to get a karma refund on the magic gun.”

Refund?!

“Is that possible?”

“It’s impossible with skills, but you can get a half refund for items. Since the magic gun is worth 100 karma, if you refund, you can get 50 karma back.”

Cha Ji-hye’s explanation followed.

“Currently, Hye-su has 50 karma.

And after receiving my magic gun, that’s a 50 karma refund.

With those 100 karma, the strategy is to gain an item that is necessary for the team, and increasing her contribution.”

“An item we definitely need?”

“It’s called an item bag.”

Cha Ji-hye handles the remote. On the projector, the screen changes.

[Item bag (small).]

Size: 32x22x8

Material: magic treated leather

Function: store non-itemized items and pass the exam door.

Price: 100 karma]

“Here, store medicine and medical supplies and the bullets you, Kim Hyun-ho, will use, and take it to Arena. If Ms. Lee Hye-su can act as the medic, that will be plenty contribution to the team.”

This is it!



Preparations for the 3rd turn exam progressed smoothly.

Kang Chun-seong received a new identity but continued to reside at the research center and do self-regulated training.

Joon-ho received training on how to use a shield and spear from a spear instructor.

The one doing the most difficult training was Hye-su. It’s because she has to fence and do emergency care at the same time.

In terms of the fencing, in order to be able to use it in short notice, vertical cut, horizontal cut, stab, she did these three moves over and over like her life depended on it, so as to make her body remember them.

On the other hand, she was sweating bullets trying to learn medicinal uses and emergency medical care.

“At this rate, she may faint before the day of the exam. Shouldn’t the training intensity be lowered a bit for her condition?”

“That is not necessary.”

“What?”

Cha Ji-hye was so firm to the point that I almost get embarrassed.

“Condition adjustment is not necessary. An intensity just at the level to harm the body is good. Anyway, when the body passes through the exam door, it goes to its prime condition.”

“Ah!”

They set up the training keeping that in mind. They aren’t a state institution for nothing.

“But what will I do?”

“...”

She suddenly doesn’t have anything to say.

“Should I practice handing bullets off to Sylph?”

“...”

“Oh, when Sylph uses the gun, I can count the bullets, or I could practice picking up pellets?”

“Okay, fine. Would you like to learn mixed martial arts?”

“Mixed martial arts?”

“Because we don’t have many rest days left, I’m not sure learning will increase your skill, but in the least, sparring and becoming familiar with fighting will be a help when

fighting lycanthropes.”

“That sounds good.”

Cha Ji-hye takes me to the 4th floor basement training center of the research facility.

It is as expansive as the 5th floor shooting range and in it, a vast assortment of exercise equipment. In the middle are a couple fight rings.

“This is an incredible setup.”

“It is for the training of examinees who are in general in very good shape, so the setup is good.”

“But no one is here.”

“...”

“I really wanted to ask but how many contracted examinees are with the Korean Arena Research Center?”

“Including your team, 67.”

“67 people?!”

I’m surprised, it’s more than I thought.

“It is on the smaller side but we are within the 50 world rankers.”

“World ranker? What is that?”

I’m confused. A world ranker? Perhaps, maybe, are there exams with examinees against each other? No way.

“It is ranked based on the total karma earned from the exams. There is no examinee that wishes to divulge what weapon or what skill they have, but simply converting total karma doesn’t matter.”

“Is verifying that possible?”

“Verifying is impossible. The contracted institution would never reveal any detailed examinee information.”

“Then one could lie to increase the ranking.”

“That is true, but there are not many instances of that. The applicable examinees sum karma is revealed by their contracted institution, but if they increase an examinee's ranking higher than it is, it would only increase the worth and cost of that examinee to them.”

“Ah...”

“On top of that, if your ranking is high, all the more, other institutions will grow jealous and take examinees by offering higher salaries.”

“So an examinee could lie to his or her institution to raise his or her price then?”

“Tricking is nearly impossible. Through observation it is possible to see about what skill level and what item and examinee has.”

It means even if you blow smoke, the researchers meticulously observe and analyze and the estimate comes out.

Suddenly, I'm really curious.

What about the opposite?

‘Can't you hide your skills?’

For example, I earned 900 karma from the exam, but I could lie and say it was 700, and use the 200 elsewhere. Like this, I can secretly grow my strength.

Just in case, hiding the real strength.

...Have I read too many martial arts novels?

It's a childish notion, but the more I think on it, it's not that bad an idea.

Even if the Korean Arena Research Center is a state institution, I cannot trust it 100%. I don't know how the situation may change if the power or responsible entity changes.

I cannot trust completely so it might be dangerous to reveal my everything.

'I should think on this more.'

"Okay, come on up."

'Hm?'

Only then do I awaken from thinking and look at Cha Ji-hye, and she is in the ring. She has UFC open finger gloves on both hands.

"Huh?"

"Put on gloves and come up."

"What are you doing right now?"

"Sparring."

"No, where's the instructor?"

"It's me."

"..."

"..."

The silence flows for a while.

"Uh, will you be okay?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm a man and I got stronger with the physical strength buff so for weight and strength..."

"Oh, that is what you meant?"

She nods her head as if she just understood and Cha Ji-hye speaks.

“Where were you in the army?”

“...3rd ammunitions depot.”

“That is rear quartermaster corps. I was in the navy special forces for 7 years, and practice muay thai from a young age.”

“...”

I’m sorry I overlooked you.

I put on open finger gloves and enter the ring.

“Then let’s begin.”

“No, wait, like this, abruptly? Teach me a little something...”

“Raise your guard.”

Oh, thanks for teaching me something good. With that, even a beginner can box real well.

I look at Cha Ji-hye approaching me using her footwork and raise my guard.

Puk!

Ah, right, there’s kicks. I was thinking boxing.



How shall I say, it’s like being pushed and pulled.

I’m surprised that it doesn’t hurt as much as I thought it would when a low kick strikes my legs. When I easily avoid a flying left jab, I realize my opponent is a woman. A woman who, without choice, is slower and weaker than a man.

‘What, this isn’t so bad.’

With my mind at ease, when the left jab slowly flies at me again, I easily avoid it and I counterattack with a punch.

...As I do so, this woman, as if she was waiting for it, speedily counters with a right hook. As I stumble she throws a left, right, high kick combo!

After viciously getting beat, I realize Cha Ji-hye is very strong.

She pretended to be weak and made me careless and then relentlessly beat me!

“The lycanthropes will be twice as fast as me.”

“Ugh”

I grab my chin and get up.

“I only got hit once, why does it hurt so bad?”

“If you get hit by a counter like that, no matter how strong, you’ll fall down.”

“Knowing that, you mercilessly beat me. Thank you.”

“We shall continue.”

She continued, moving with footwork left and right, attacking me.

It must be the power of the physical strength buff. Her being a woman, my strength and agility are above her. I avoided or blocked the average attack with reflexes.

But then, from a sudden flurry of combinations, I cannot get my head straight. She blinds my gaze with a jab and then flies over a low kick, pretends to punch with a feint, and then high kicks.

“If you are getting acclimated now, I will include elbows.”

“Eh?”

I’m dying from pain right now, and you want elbows?

Cha Ji-hye sends over a left jab. I think she’ll follow with an elbow so I raise my guard with both arms.

But then she suddenly grabs my neck with both hands and jumps up high.

Bbuk!

“Gguek!”

From my mouth a sound, far from dignified, shoots out. Anyone who suffers a direct hit to the solar plexus will make this sound.

“El-elbows, you said...”

“You are denser than I thought. Like someone who’s never exercised or played sports before.”

“Any exercise I’ve ever done is just some hiking.”

“Do you not possess 1st degree in Taekwondo.”

“I just went through the motions for about a week in the army and they just gave it to me. They tossed those degrees around like coupons.”

“...”

She takes off her gloves.

“This won’t do. It will be better for you to make a wooden spear like you did in the second exam. Do not, under any circumstance, face against a lycanthrope. Hold it off with the wooden spear and in urgent need, use the spirit.”

“Ugg, okay.”

I sigh.

At best, I got the entry level 4 physical strength buff but it’s like pearls around a pig’s neck. The role most befitting me right now is obediently holding bullets next to the gun shooting Sylph.



I return home and no one’s home. I use Sylph to clean the house and afterwards, out of boredom, I summon my new weapon.

“Weapon.”

As I say so, in my right hand is the hefty rifle, Mosin-Nagant. It shows signs of being old, but I sense its vintage charm.

I gave Hye-su my magic gun and along with it the bullets and belt, and from now on, this is my weapon.

Max range is a staggering 548 meters.

It's an antique, old enough it was used in Czarist Russia, and it makes me a little nervous, but I did confirm its performance at the shooting range earlier today. Well, Sylph did.

They say snipers of the world wars used this so I guess I'll believe in it.

‘Do me well.’

I pet the Mosin-Nagant and whisper in my heart.

Time left until the next exam, 11 days.

Chapter 33

Examinees (1)

I think I frugally used the 15 days of the rest period. I split it here and split it there and used it preciously. Even so, time went by so fast.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 5

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Rest until the next exam.

-Time limit: 10 hours 21 minutes

As it became the day of the exam, the Korean Arena Research Center came to pick me up. I tell my family I am going on a trip with friends and leave the house.

I take the car to the army base heliport and take a helicopter and arrive at the research center.

The research center heliport is a commotion.

It's because there is more than one helicopter arriving.

Out of a helicopter that lands almost at the same time as me, three people get out.

It is two guys and one lady, looking to be about late 20's to middle 30's.

"Ugh, so annoying. I hope this exam finishes within a week."

Complains the girl with dyed blonde hair who looks to be about my age.

"The last exam took 2 months right? It was like aging 60 days in one night..."

As the small and gentle looking guy sighs, the blonde girl covers her face with her hair and cries out.

“No, I don’t want to! I don’t want to get old! I don’t want to be in my 30’s!”

Hm, definitely. She’s the same age as me.

The guy with a bulky frame sees all this and laughs.

“They’re examinees!”

Aside from my teammates, this is the first time seeing other examinees. I never met one in the research center.

The three discover me.

“Eh? Who?”

The blonde girl shows her curiosity.

“Isn’t he a rookie?”

Says the guy with the good build.

“Can’t know that. He could be a veteran examinee scouted over from China.”

“Just ask.”

The blonde girl, without hesitation, comes towards me.

“Hi? Who are you?”

With a white shirt and short hot pants, her bare legs so openly exposed, she’s an impressionable woman. With plenty of playfulness with speech lacking etiquette, she reminds me of a high school delinquent.

Speaking informally from the get-go, if I come out too respectful, won’t it feel like I’m losing from the start?

“Ni men da jia hao.”

I greet her using all the Chinese I know.

The startled blonde girl turns around to the guys and speaks.

“It’s true! They really must have brought him from China.”

“They treat their examinees like shit so it’s easy to scout them. Public security officer surveillance is strict so if he got smuggled out, does that mean he’s really good?”

“Don’t jump to a conclusion so fast. He could be from Taiwan.”

The three people get into a debate about me.

The blonde woman looks at me with eyes full of curiosity and talks.

“Um, nice to meet you. Are, you, um... tester? Magic? Or fighter?”

English ability at an easily understood level.

“Wuh dduh ming deo shao watda pang tsu su.”

I spew out stuff to sound anything like Chinese. The blonde woman is flustered.

“Uh, do it in English, guy. You don’t know English? English! I thought Chinese people were good at English?”

She talks like she knows English.

“Wang shao ming ni dduh ling...”

It was when I was in the midst of flustering the blonde woman, playing Chinese man.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, what are you doing over there?”

From behind me, I hear the short cadence of a business like woman’s voice.

It’s Cha Ji-hye.

I laugh and reply.

“I was pretending to be Chinese.”

The blonde woman goes blank at my words. The two guys too, go blank.

“Hahahaha!”

The guy with the good build explodes in laughter. The gentle looking guy laughs too.

“Ugh, what! You suddenly spoke in Chinese and surprised me!”

The blonde woman gets angry at me.

“Should I have spoken in English?”

“Ugh, I’m so mad! What are you? An examinee?”

“Yes.”

“What turn?”

“...”

If I’m honest and tell her 2nd turn, she’ll probably look down on me as a newbie.

I was going to be vague and say it’s a secret when.

“This is 2nd turn examinee, Mr. Kim Hyun-ho. Welcome him.”

Cha Ji-hye! You inconsiderate woman!

As expected, the blonde woman squints her eyes.

“Pft, 2nd turn?”

“And you?”

“Oh ho, this noona is 19th turn.”

19th turn?!

I'm taken by surprise.

If she has passed the 19th turn, just how strong is she?

"Oh ho, surprised? You want to learn a lot from this noona now, huh?"

"There will be lots to learn. These people are on their 19th turn, and are veterans that have cleared 14 exams."

At Cha Ji-hye's explanation, this time, I squint my eyes.

"So they've failed 5 times?"

"So, so what? You think there's an examinee that's cleared all exams without failing?"

You cannot succeed in all the exams?

I'm surprised at those words.

Now that I think about it, it's true. Our teams Hye-su failed the first exam. But she did not die and is still living. You just need to be able to handle the minus karma penalty.

"In the instance of failing, how is the penalty? Is it manageable?"

The blonde woman shrugs her shoulders.

"Just like being given karma for succeeding the exam, if you fail, it gets taken away. It depends and is evaluated on how hard we tried how much will we had."

"So an exam failure doesn't always mean death."

"Yea, the thing to be fearful of is death. You guys are now going into the 3rd turn?"

"Yes."

"I don't want to say anything useless to make your condition worse, but be careful. We all each lost a comrade in 2nd and 3rd turn. It's the 2nd, 3rd jinx."

Jinx?

At her words my heart chills.

For us too, one person died in the 2nd turn. I did kill him, but dead is dead.

Is this a jinx?

“There is no jinx.”

Cha Ji-hye interrupts the conversation.

“From a common sense standpoint, it is reasonable to have casualties in 2nd, 3rd turns with still new examinees. But in the case of Mr. Kim Hyun-ho’s team, in comparison to other teams, his team is qualitatively superior, and will have no problems.”

“Hey, really? If Ji-hye unni says that, you guys must have a pretty good chance.”

Unni?

“Are you in your 30’s?”

“If I am?”

At my question, Cha Ji-hye’s face becomes cold. Crap, I’ve never seen her angry face before.

“You, you look young for your age. I thought you, Miss Ji-hye, were a lot younger.”

At those words, Cha Ji-hye’s face opens up but this time, the blonde woman gets angry.

“You wanna die?”

“He just told the truth.”

“If you count the time spent in Arena, aren’t you girls pretty much the same age?”

At the two men’s comments, the blonde woman is boiling almost to the point of explosion.

Cha Ji-hye quickly intercedes.

“You should all introduce yourselves to each other. You may have to meet and carry out the exam in the Arena later.”

“Humph, I’m Yoo Ji-soo. And I’m 29.”

The blonde woman is Yoo Ji-soo.

“Cha Jin-hyuk, 33.”

The guy with the good build is Cha Jin-hyuk.

“Lee Ji-yong. I’m 33 too.”

The small and kind looking man is Lee Ji-yong.

Blond woman Yoo Ji-soo adds on.

“Also, I’m the team leader. These kids are like my concubines, hahaha.”

“Shut up.”

“Don’t say things that can be misconstrued.”

The two guys quickly oppose.

This girl’s manners could not get any worse. To call her elders kids. Cha Jin-hyuk looks like he might hold a temper but seeing as how he permits it, it looks like he gave up a long time ago.

“I am Kim Hyun-ho and I am 29.”

“Huh? You’re the same age as me.”

“If you combine the time spent in Arena, I am younger.”

“Shut up.”

Yoo Ji-hye quickly gets serious.



On the research center's 1st floor basement is a place called the examinee waiting room.

There is a wide hall, and in the hallway are bedroom accommodations for examinees all lined up, and on the other side, a cluster of cabinets.

"Oppa."

"Hyung!"

Hye-su and Joon-ho heartily welcome me. The two look drained of their energies.

"Are you guys okay? You don't look so good."

"It is because of the overexertion due to highly intense training. It will make a full recovery upon passing through the exam door so do not worry."

Cha Ji-hye answers for them.

"My arms and legs don't move very well. I'd rather just hurry up and go to the exam."

Joon-ho is about to cry. Hye-su must agree cause with a miserable face, she nods her head up and down.

On another note, the Yoo Ji-soo group that came in with me go to each of their cabinets as soon as they arrive. From the cabinets, they grab all kinds of garments and go into the bedrooms.

Silently doing what they need to, it seems familiar to them. Then again, they are 19th turn veterans.

A moment later, they have changed clothes and come out, and their appearance is indeed unusual.

"What? Fallen for me?"

Yoo Ji-soo jokingly asks me.

“No. What kind of look is that?”

“No choice. If you wear Earth clothes in Arena, it’s too obvious. You have to have an outfit that is common in Arena. And inside, wear the battle suit.”

The three people are wearing Renaissance period’s modern European style clothing. Leather boots, gloves, a cloak even with a hood, they look like they came out of a European folk village.

“No need to stare so interestedly. You guys have to dress like this too?”

Only then do I turn my gaze to the cabinets. Amongst the cabinets, there are those with our names on it.

“Should we change in advance too? Since we have to get used to the battle suit and clothes.”

“Yeah, lets.”

Eventually, our team changes clothes too. In each individually labelled cabinet is a battle suit, Arena clothing and shoes, all prepared in the correct size.

I go into the bedroom to change clothes and the battle suit over my underwear reminds me of Superman’s outfit. The flexibility is surprisingly good and doesn’t make it uncomfortable at all and its temperature control is good so that I probably won’t get cold out in the open.

“This is some incredible clothing. Didn’t they say it isn’t easily penetrated by knives either?”

As I stare at my tight fitting battle suit, I take a little time to admire my graceful body again.

On top of that I wear a cloth material shirt and pants tightened with a strong belt. With the hooded cloak on, sure makes me look like I’m cosplaying.

“This is a little embarrassing.”

After getting all dressed and coming out, all the teammates have changed as well. It looks like Joon-ho and Hye-su are also a little embarrassed about their outfits. Chic

Kang Chun-seong doesn't seem phased.

"Why did they provide us with a cloak? It hangs and swishes and is a bit uncomfortable."

At Joon-ho's question, Lee Ji-yong from Yoo Ji-soo's team kindly offers an explanation.

"When you are out, you can use it as a blanket, and in a fight, it can work as armor. In the Arena world, it's a necessity for a traveler so it would be good to get used to it quick."

"Ah... thank you for the friendly explanation."

"Don't mention it. Oh, I assumed I was older so I spoke informally, is that okay?"

"Of course. I am Lee Joon-ho and I am still 20 years old."

"Such struggles at a young age. I am Lee Ji-yong. This is Yoo Ji-soo and he's Cha Jin-hyuk."

And thus we introduced ourselves with Yoo Ji-soo's team.

We still had 9 hours until the exam time so we spent the time conversing with one another.

Then suddenly Cha Jin-hyuk speaks.

"Over there, you said you are Kang Chun-seong?"

"I am."

"I sense an extraordinary aura, you're really a 2nd turn?"

"You sense?"

"Ah, don't know yet? When you get to aura control entry level 6, you can sense others' aura. As the level increases, your detectability develops."

"Is that so."

“But if you’re a 2nd turn and learned your aura control, you must barely be at entry level 1, and your aura is a bit weird?”

“I am entry level 5.”

At those words, I’m surprised too.

Not too long ago, Kang Chun-seong was at level 4. In that time, he’s gone up another level?

Chapter 34

Examinees (Part 2)

“Level 5?”

Cha Jin-hyuk’s face is in astonishment.

“You lying?”

It’s a very Yoo Ji-soo style frankness.

“I can’t see how realistically, a 2nd turn examinee would have enough karma to lift his main skill to entry level 5...”

Well-mannered Lee Ji-yong too is of the notion that it’s too hard to believe.

But Kang Chun-seong merely scoffs and doesn’t look like he is going to explain, whether he’s misconstrued or not. Eventually, I stepped in and explained.

“You were that incredible of a martial artist?”

Cha Jin-hyuk’s eyes become provocative.

“I kind of want to see your skills. How about it, martial artist man? A light warming up before the exam, yeah?”

“As much as you wish.”

Kang Chun-seong gladly accepts. Even in front of 19th turn veterans, he doesn’t seem frightened at all.

“Will he be okay?”

Hye-su worries and asks me. I nod my head.

“There’s no problem as long as he doesn’t die. Since you completely recuperate when

you go through the exam door. We're wearing these battle suits and these kinds of clothes for the first time, so warming up might be a good idea."

The two people get up from their seats and move to the empty space in the hall.

Across from Kang Chun-seong assuming his position, Cha Jin-hyuk puts both fists up in a boxing pose. Is that guy not going to use a weapon either?

"There is one thing I'm curious about."

"What is it?"

"With Chinese martial arts, you gather that chi by dancing around right? Does that help in an actual fight?"

Cha Jin-hyuk's provocation. Kang Chun-seong's eyes twitch.

"I will show you."

Kang Chun-seong shifts just his feet and slowly narrows the distance. It's a method of slowly moving forward by using his heels and toes as an axis.

As he gets within punching distance, Cha Jin-hyuk lightly extends a jab. Then,

Pat!

"...!"

Counter timing the jab, Kang Chun-seong dives in.

In an instant, Kang Chun-seong shortens the distance and sends flying a flurry of punches.

Papapapapak!

A storm of punches lands above Cha Jin-hyuk's guard.

It's an incredible speed. Firmly blocking the serenade of punches, Cha Jin-hyuk reacts with a knee kick. At that moment.

Pat!

Kang Chun-seong, with both feet stuck to the ground, moves his body 360 degrees and strikes the knee. Is that a Baguazhang move? Regardless, it's amazing.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

At the moment he does the knee kick and supplanted leg takes a hit, Cha Jin-hyuk loses his balance and falters. Kang Chun-seong strikes his leg once more and he falls down.

“Ah, damn! It’s strong, Chinese martial arts!”

Mumbles Cha Jin-hyuk as he abruptly gets up.

“Want to continue?”

“What are you jabbering about? This is just the start?”

Cha Jin-hyuk moves in.

But without being able to do a single proper attack, he gets cornered into defending again.

He attempted to attack with light jabs but Kang Chun-seong countered the jabs again with impeccable timing and struck.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

Hit by a punch, Cha Jin-hyuk’s chin shifts to the side.

After that, Kang Chun-seong makes big swirls with his arms, like a windmill. The left arm pushes the chest, the right arm grabs the leg, and just like that, knocks Cha Jin-hyuk backwards.

Kudang!

“Uk!”

Cha Jin-hyuk has fallen on his back again.

Kang Chun-seong does not attack any further and steps back as he speaks.

“Stop here. It is pointless.”

“What?”

Cha Jin-hyuk bursts.

“Hahaha! Totally got your ass whooped!”

“Shut up!”

Cha Jin-hyuk gets angry at Yoo Ji-soo’s laughter.

Kang Chun-seong speaks.

“That is all.”

“What, you saying even if we fight more you’ll still win?”

At Cha Jin-hyuk’s question, Kang Chun-seong replies in his usual steady voice.

“Regardless of how many times, I will win. As long as you don’t pull out a sword.”

Cha Jin-hyuk for sure, and Yoo Ji-soo and Lee Ji-yong’s faces are all in shock.

‘So that’s it. I thought so, they were too weak to be 19th turn veterans.’

Even though Kang Chun-seong is strong, a 19th turn veteran would have more skills with that much more karma. With that in account, Cha Jin-hyuk now was too weak.

It’s because he wasn’t using his weapon.

“Wow, he’s a fortune teller.”

Yoo Ji-soo is in awe.

"Caught?"

Cha Jin-hyuk scratches his head.

"Do not think yourself to be on top of my head, rookie."

"Haha, rookie is a bit harsh. Can't help it. I haven't done martial arts my whole life like you."

"He was a car mechanic~"

"Shut up."

Cha Jin-hyuk gets upset at Yoo Ji-soo's slight tattling.

"How did you know I use a sword?"

"Distance. You maintained a stance further than the distance for a jab. Also..."

Kang chun-seong continues to speak.

"Energy, whose concept of mental significance was discussed by Mencius (Chinese philosopher), in regards to martial arts, is one perspective of looking at the mind and body altogether, not some supernatural energy."

"..."

"Saying swerving and dancing sounds like something you gathered from perhaps watching tai chi, but that is the same. It is a practice of learning the body's circulation and movement together through breathing. If you are lazy in that, like you, your legs and arms will move separate from each other, your attack and defense will act separately, and your aura will act alone."

"Ah, this lesson is a gem. Did you hear? You should write it down and learn."

Yoo Ji-soo is chattering.

"Shut up, you bitch. Hey, what did you say? It's the practice of learning the body's circulation and movement together through breathing?"

Cha Jin-hyuk asks to Kang Chun-seong.

“That is so.”

“Then is hypogastric breathing type stuff in the same context?”

“It can be seen as such.”

“So you’re saying you raised your aura control level with that?”

“I have done this all my life. It can be said that I reviewed and applied that concept of Chi to aura.”

“What did you say chi was? Explain it again.”

Cha Jin-hyuk must have grown some interest, because he asks Kang Chun-seong this and that, and every time, Kang Chun-seong gives a short but clear answer. The situation has changed from a duel to a lecture.

A whole while later, Cha Jin-hyuk’s face shows a look of satisfaction.

“Hm, nice. I will consult this.”

“As you want.”

“I learned a lot of good stuff, so I’ll pay it forward. Retrieve, item bag.”

As he does so, in Cha Jin-hyuk’s hand, appears a small cross-body bag.

From the cross-body bag, Cha Jin-hyuk takes out a bottle holding a red liquid.

“Here, take this.”

Kang Chun-seong receives the bottle of red liquid.

“It’s a healing potion. It immediately heals wounds. It’s precious so use it only in an emergency. It has no effect on illness or physical decline, so use it only for wounds.”

Kang Chun-seong takes a close look at the healing potion, and hands it to Hye-su.

“Pack it.”

“Yes...”

Hye-su too summons her item bag and puts the healing potion in it, but Hye-su’s item bag is already full the bullets for my Mosin-Nagant and first aid items, that it doesn’t go in very well.

“Ugh, give it here.”

Yoo Ji-soo can’t stand the sight and helps out. She shoves the healing potion into the item bag until it looks like it will burst. I’m worried it might rip the bag but surprisingly, it fits.

“The item bag is really sturdy. You can just shove things in and it won’t burst, so don’t worry.”

“Oh, thank you.”

As our team’s sunbae*, Yoo Ji-soo gives us a lot of tips.

(TN: a word that refers to people with more experience)

We spent time like this, and when there was 3 hours left until the exam, Cha Ji-hye appeared.

“Are you all ready?”

“Yes.”

“Then you may all go into your individual rooms. There cannot be an instance where you take off any items of clothing before the exam begins. There was an instance when someone took off their shoes and entered the exam that way.”

“Duly noted.”

We go into our rooms. Yoo Ji-soo’s team bids us as they go into their rooms.

“Let’s see each other tomorrow. Even though it’s not a tomorrow for us.”

“Let’s live and see each other again.”

I am in my room and lay still in my bed.

This is now the third exam. This time, with the help of the research center, we have really systematically prepared.

But as the time draws closer, I can’t help but be anxious. The words ‘2nd, 3rd turn jinx’ keep going around in my head and make me feel uneasy.

‘No one can die this turn.’

I do not regret Park Go-chan’s death. He had to die.

But this time is only good comrades. Joon-ho, Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong, I really hope no one dies.

And the time is close.

I summon my board to check the time and see a second left, and lose consciousness.



As soon as I come to, I check my teammates. Joon-ho, Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong, everyone is here together.

We just get our bearings and the tedious baby angel bastard, dangling his bbundegi, flaps his way towards us.

“Welcome. Glad to see me?”

“...”

“Wow, seeing your attire, it looks like you are all look fully prepared for battle.”

“We did learn of a world we didn’t know existed.”

Nations individually recruit examinees and have institutions that aid them, and who knew that they even rank the examinees based on the karma they accrue?

Not to mention, they are gathering to use the majeong that examinees bring back from Arena, to use as energy.

‘Something is strange...’

“What’s strange?”

“Ack, you surprised me!”

The angel bastard shoves his face close to mine, taking me by surprise, and I take a few steps back.

“Fucker! You startled me!”

“It looked like examinee Kim Hyun-ho was once again suspicious of something.”

“Of course it’s strange!”

I say.

“The Earth and Arena are separate worlds. It’s a world that should be impossible to touch physically, am I right?”

“You are.”

“But the entirety of our world knows well about Arena and is participating in it. And they are taking and gathering the majeong we bring from Arena to use as a high-efficiency energy, is this all possible?”

“What’s to say it isn’t.”

This bastard fellow is picking his ear with his pinky finger and responds disrespectfully.

“Won’t it go against the laws of worldly order or anything like that?”

“Nope, no.”

The baby angel dismisses with a wave of his hands.

But the more I think about it, the stranger it is.

Examinees are selected amongst the dead.

Even though you spend a week in the Arena, only the time spent sleeping passes on Earth.

That could be a consideration in order not to engulf the Earth in chaos.

But actually, examinees are restricted to secrecy. The whole world knows about Arena and examinees and have even made secret organizations and are researching it. Even though it isn't revealed to the general public.

'Did they intentionally induce us? Is that another purpose amongst others of the exam?'

My thoughts are to there when I'm interrupted.

"Okay, up to there."

The baby angel taps my head.

"What?"

"Examinee Kim Hyun-ho does indeed have some deep thoughts."

"Are my speculations correct?"

"Huh? I never said that they are correct. Just that you have deep thoughts. It's not a compliment."

What is that, that obscure answer.

The baby angel snaps his fingers. The exam door appears.

"Now now, hurry up and start. Or do you want to spend more time with me?"

Without a second word we all headed into the door one by one.

I enter the exam door last.

When I am surrounded by a bright light, I suddenly hear behind me the dim voice of

the angel.

"I never said you were wrong either. Hehe."

What, that bastard! Can't he just say you're right or wrong for sure!

Finally, I lose consciousness to the strong light. And the third exam begins thus.



I'm so tired of this forest.

Where we arrive is the ravine where we last stayed in the 2nd exam.

The remains of a campfire, around it the strewn bones of fish and rabbit, the traces of our presence are just as they were.

Chapter 35

Lycanthrope (Part 1)

“First, let’s check our mission.”

“Okay, hyung.”

“Let’s.”

Joon-ho and Hye-su immediately reply and Kang Chun-seong too nods his head. Ah, this cooperation. Now that Park Go-chan isn’t here, the starting atmosphere is good.

“Board retrieval.”

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 5

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Escape the forest

-Time limit: 20 days

“20 days?”

It startles Hye-su.

“We have to wander this forest for that long...”

Joon-ho seems astonished as well.

Even though we are familiar with surviving due to going through the second exam, plus we have done all the necessary preparations, to live in the wild is an extremely difficult task.

Uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, chilly weather, plenty of pests, battling those difficulties for 20 days, it's no wonder we all detest this. I'm so sick of this forest too.

As the team leader, I decide to calm the group first.

"No need to worry too much. Perhaps they are just giving us plenty of time with the 20 days. If we can get out of the forest, it probably won't be 20 days."

"That's probably right."

Joon-ho nods his head and agrees.

"Anyway, like the research center predicted, and our mission is to escape the forest, let's move east as planned."

I summon Sylph

-Meow.

The wind shapes itself into a slender cat, becoming Sylph. She's being cute and wrapping her tail around my neck and greets me.

"Scout the surrounding area please."

-Meow.

She nods her head and swiftly flies away.

"Okay, let's go."

I take the lead and start walking.

"Oppa, don't we have to go east?"

Asks Hye-su.

I nod my head.

"Yeah, this way is east."

"Really? How do you know the direction?"

Oh, she must not have heard of my assist skill I got.

I make a simple explanation about the 'navigator' assist skill I got with 100 karma.

"Wow, from now on we won't get lost then."

"Well yeah, but not really yet. I only know the general direction, and I have to research this skill a bit more."

Of course, the navigator assist skill proved itself plenty useful when I went and caught the preparing-for-the-workforce Hyun-ji partying at a club.

After that, I was able to learn a lot about the navigator skill from Cha Ji-hye.

-Navigator (assist skill): gain a sixth sense to know the destination's location and direction.

*Entry level 1: Know the general direction. (-100)

This is the extent of the entry level 1 navigator.

First, I know the direction but not the distance. I do not know if it's a walkable distance or an un-seeable distance.

Second, in the case of finding an item or person, I have to have seen the entity before.

My younger sister, Hyun-ji, I have seen before, so I was definitely able to sense which direction she was in. The teammates gathered here together, if they were to scatter into the forests, I can find them.

But for example, let's say I have to find 'another examinee in Cheonan.' That is impossible. Because I haven't met that person yet.

By chance, even if I had run into said examinee on the street, I do not know definitively who the 'examinee in Cheonan' is so I wouldn't be able to find the person.

The same goes for a celebrity I have seen from TV or the internet. I have never met them in person so the navigator skill doesn't react.

"If you raise your skill level, you'll be able to know for sure?"

Asks Hye-su.

"I could, but Miss Cha Ji-hye said that its sufficient just to have it at entry level 1. And to use that karma on other skills instead will be better."

As we walked, I periodically summoned Sylph to scout the surroundings and thus we didn't feel very anxious.

We experienced enough from the last exam and this forest no longer feels like a foreign place. And the red apes that appeared in this vicinity is an enemy we fought plenty and we aren't scared.

Because of all that, while we moved, we chatted with each other.

It mainly revolved around my navigator skill, so it wasn't all useless talk.

"How about this?"

Joon-ho randomly picks up a small rock from the floor.

"Watch closely."

Joon-ho extends both his fists to me.

"Guess which hand the rock is in."

I stare intently at both of Joon-ho's fists but no particular sense comes to me.

"I don't know."

"Aw, I guess it doesn't work for that."

Joon-ho shows me the rock he was holding in his right hand.

I scout with Sylph and learn that within this whole area, red apes are wandering sparingly.

'It would be best to avoid a conflict.'

They have already lost their leader to us, a big blow. If they know we have appeared again, they will probably overreact. It is best to avoid them as much as possible and quickly get out of their territory.

A day passes without incident.

I summon Sylph multiple times to scout and we avoid any conflicts.

The most dangerous enemy we encountered today, is but a snake that fell off a tree. As soon as the snake appeared, it got its head torn off by Sylph, who happened to be summoned.

Joon-ho and Hye-su were made extremely uncomfortable by it, but following Kang Chun-seong's opinion, we butchered it and grilled and ate it. Is it because he's Chinese? He doesn't eat anything.

After dinner, we gather around the fire and talk about this and that, when suddenly Joon-ho gets a stomachache.

"Ah, why does my stomach hurt so bad?"

"Did you eat something bad?"

"The only thing that touched my lips is that snake meat, hyung."

Joon-ho rubs his stomach and grimaces. It seems the snake meat isn't agreeing with him and is making him ill.

"Hold on."

Hye-su takes out a small pill from the item bag.

"It's a digestant."

"Thanks, noona."

Joon-ho eats the digestant that Hye-su gives him.

I guess there was a digestant in the first aid items that Hye-su packed. Then again, you can get pretty sick eating in the wild.

“I am sorry.”

A rare apology from Kang Chun-seong. He thinks it's cause Joon-ho ate the snake meat because of him.

“No, it's okay, it was tasty.”

“Joon-ho, don't stand sentry tonight and just go rest up early.”

“Okay, hyung.”

Joon-ho falls asleep first, and we go to sleep after deciding the sentry order.

Thankfully, the digestant must have worked, cause Joon-ho's face in the firelight looks alright.

Like that, without any event, the first day passed.



“I'm sorry everyone, because of me.”

The next morning, Joon-ho apologizes to all of us. It seems he feels sorry for missing sentry duty due to his stomachache.

“That's okay. Is the pain gone now?”

“Yeah.”

“That's good. Let's eat breakfast and immediately get going.”

Hye-su and I together prepare the morning meal. I use Sylph to hunt the most manageable, a rabbit, and Hye-su gathers strawberries and a fruit that looks like a tangerine, and some greens.

“Noona, is that fruit and greens edible?”

“Yep, I learned it for sure, so don't worry.”

Hye-su received sword training and medic care and also learned how to decipher

edible fruits and vegetables.

She trained just as hard as she is weak and her efforts are already paying off.

'Now that I think of it, we walked all day yesterday and she didn't show signs of exhaustion.'

Compared to the last second exam, Hye-su has made greatly improved strides. She worried about being a burden going forward, it's a relief.

We finish our meal and start moving again.

Hye-su, with the weakest physique, got the physical strength buff entry level 1, the body of a healthy adult male, and the march isn't wearing her out.

With Sylph's scouting, we avoid conflict with the red apes and walk for half a day.

It is at the point when the darkness starts to cover the vast forest.

-Meow!

Sylph suddenly appears in the middle of her scouting and makes a sharp noise.

"Is it an enemy?"

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head.

"Are they coming this way?"

This time she shakes her head.

But Sylph's demeanor is unlike her. She is completely different than when she discovered the red apes wandering in search of food.

I think maybe, and ask.

"Is it an enemy other than red apes?"

Sylph nods her head.



“I feel like something just passed us by really quick.”

Says someone.

The others chime in agreement.

“I felt it too. It was some kind of hazy shape.”

“You guys too? I thought it was just a feeling.”

Dusk begins to settle on the forest.

Four human shadows slowly walk on.

“No sound or smell, interesting.”

“I know. How is that possible?

“It’s a creature never seen before in our territory.”

And then.

“Idiots.”

The largest shadow among them speaks up.

“Like there is a creature without scent or noise.”

The other three stop talking and pay attention.

It continues.

“It is most likely a spirit.”

“Spirit?”

"Is that true, hyung?"

To the surprised younger siblings, the one called hyung continues speaking.

"A long time ago when grandfather was alive, I heard of it once. He said there is a spirit in this world but it is not alive, but alive."

"Grandfather said he saw a spirit?"

"A time long ago, when grandfather was banished from our clan one time, he tried to cross a green mountain range to the west."

"A green mountain range?"

"Uh, that's the..."

The dongsaengs* are lost in thought.

(TN: What you would call a sibling or a close friend that is younger than you.)

"Everyone died but grandfather, who came here. He said he saw a spirit then."

"Of course everyone died! It's so lucky that grandfather was able to survive, even!"

"That's the elves' territory!"

Anxiety spread to the three dongsaengs' faces. They look at hyung and ask.

"Then perhaps, did that spirit belong to an elf?"

"If elves invade our territory, that's a big problem!"

"We have to alert father!"

"Don't act hastily!"

Hyung yells in a large voice. The three dongsaengs don't say a word.

Hyung growls as he speaks.

“We have yet to verify anything, what good will it be to alert father? Do you want him to think you all cowards?”

“No, no.”

“Not that.”

“We are not cowards.”

At the mention of ‘father’, the panicking dongsaengs calm down. To them, this father entity is of special existence.

“Let’s check it out ourselves. I have heard that it is not only elves that retain spirits. Grandfather said that there is the rare human who is friends with an elf and learns to summon spirits.”

The hyung’s words continue.

“If it is an elf, we won’t engage, and we’ll tell father. And if it is a human... We will do the same to it as we have the other humans that have stepped foot in our territory.”

“Okay.”

“You’re right.”

The dongsaengs approve.

The night sky’s moonlight comes down through the dense deciduous forest and lights the four shadows.

Their appearance as lit by the moonlight, is a bipedal beast covered in silver fur.

“Let’s go!”

The hyung leads the pack and runs, and the dongsaengs follow after him.

“Grrr!”

“Grrrr!”

As they begin to run, they start to show their wild nature.

With resilient legs they kick the earth and support their body with their arms, running like a four legged beast.

Their eyes glow with a sparkle, with rolls of bloodthirst. They are the eyes of beasts hungry for blood.

And so the four lycanthrope brothers set out to find their enemy.

Chapter 36

Lycanthrope (Part 2)

The four lycanthropes, with their silver fur, speed through the forest.

Within their clan, scores of their brothers and sisters are teeming. But even amongst them all, these four brothers have the same mother, and have a special relationship with each other.

The eldest son Helgi, born with strength and poise, was distinguished as the next leader of the clan. But Helgi was not overconfident and always held himself lower, and this was enough to earn his father's confidence.

'Because I saw, clearly, how hyung died.'

Originally, there were five brothers born to their mother. There was a brother that was three years older than Helgi.

He was a hyung that was very strong.

It was always said that he inherited the most of his father's blood.

A story spread amongst the clan that the leader would change in a short while. It was said that father's long time rule was soon to be broken.

But he opened the lid and what did he find.

The overconfident hyung, against his mother's dissuading, challenged his father. He was engulfed with the desire to hold his father's position and his wives. He died instantly with a blow to his neck.

"I know."

Holding the hyung's smashed neck with one hand, father spoke to everyone.

"I wish that all of you possess the same ambition that rests ablaze in my own heart."

The brothers looked at their father with awe. The mothers and sisters too looked on at father with envy.

"But right now is not the time. Do not challenge me. Wait a little longer and I will show you a new world. Then, I will welcome any and all challenges."

A body bigger than anyone else.

A beautiful silver fur coat that shines in the moonlight more than anyone else's.

He smashed the strongest of challengers with one blow and so, his father continued to reign over clan.

And Helgi realized it.

'Father has some grand plan.'

A plan far grander than any power struggles within the clan.

Helgi decided to side with his father's plan. Helgi, like his dead brother, desired for his father's power and women, but deemed it unfeasible through strength.

Helgi's decision was right.

After that, all the brothers that challenged their father lost their lives. Father defeated the challengers without a scratch to himself.

As the brothers who revealed their desires with their challenges kept dying, Helgi earned his father's trust and climbed the ranks in the clan. As a prize, he even earned two sisters from a different mother as wives.

And then other brothers followed in Helgi's footsteps, and began pledging allegiance to their father, but Helgi was already firmly in place as the second in command.

Helgi's three brothers from the same mother followed their eldest brother. They followed Helgi, trying to distinguish themselves and looking for an opportunity to earn a prize from father.

How far did they run?

They pick up the enemy's scent.

"It's this way!"

"This smell is human!"

As they learn their opponent is human, the lycanthropes grow confident.

To the brothers, an elf is a dubious opponent, but a human is merely food. They know the taste of human blood and lean meat very well.

"Don't underestimate it. It is said that there are strong ones amongst humans."

Helgi warns them but the dongsaengs don't hear it and run even harder.

Their eagerness shines bright in their eyes, competing with each other to make the first contribution.

But then.

Tang-

A weird noise rings from far away.

Puk!

And the dongsaeng that ran ahead, his skull blows up.

Helgi and his group are completely surprised and abruptly stop.

"Wha, what?!"

"What did you just do?"

Having just lost a brother and not knowing how, the dongsaengs fall into chaos.

'It felt like something flew by.'

Helgi stays composed and thinks.

It felt like something small flew by and then his dongsaeng's head blew up.

He doesn't know what it is, but he is sure that it is a new weapon that the human has.

Tang- pajik!

Another brother's head blows up and Helgi is sure this time.

"Hide!"

Helgi shouts as he quickly hides behind a tree. The only dongsaeng left hides his body into the woods.

As they hide, the unknown attacks stop.

'Every time there is a loud noise, one dies.'

The inside of Helgi's head becomes complicated.

'Between the first and second attack, there was some time. It must not be able to consecutively shoot.'

If a rapid consecutive attack was possible, all the brothers would be dead.

"Then..."

Helgi looks at his dongsaeng behind the trees, shaking in fear. Helgi's eyes become sharp.

"Listen to me carefully."

As Helgi opens his mouth, the dongsaeng looks at him.

"On one, two, three, let's jump out at the same time."

"To fight?"

"You idiot. How would we fight against a bastard with a weapon like this? We're making a run for it."

“Oh, okay.”

“Count. One, two...”

On the count of three the dongsaeng jumps out from behind the woods. But Helgi doesn't move a muscle and stays hidden behind the tree.

Tang- puk!

The dongsaeng's head blows up and his life is futilely lost.

‘Now!’

At last, Helgi jumps out from behind his tree. He rushes for his dead brother and takes his corpse onto his back.

Tang!

A sharp sound is heard again but whatever it is that flew by violently lodges itself into his brother's corpse, carried on his back.

Using his dead brother as a shield, Helgi keeps running. He runs desperately, so hard that his tail may fall out.



We blankly stare at Sylph, coolly sniping with the Mosin-Nagant.

Sylph is so cute to begin with but now that she's holding a rifle that's bigger than herself and shooting it, Hye-su is completely charmed by it. Cha Ji-hye was too, Sylph holding a gun is a real woman trap.

Four rounds of shooting.

And then Sylph shakes her head and hands over the Mosin-Nagant to me.

“How did it go?”

Sylph makes a number 3 with her tail.

"You lost one?"

-Meow...

With a neck like a limp weed, Sylph nods her head. I pick up Sylph and place her on my shoulder and console her.

"That's okay, you still did great."

We walk to where the lycanthropes lay dead.

We only saw the lycanthropes as illustrations at the research center, and seeing them in person is a bit of a shock.

With a big build that is a head taller than humans, its hard body is covered in silver fur, with long and sharp nails.

How do you think it feels to come face to face with a monster that seems like it came out of a fantasy movie? I'm completely flustered as to if this is reality or fantasy.

But the stench of blood that stings my nostrils wakes me to this reality.

"Ugh!"

Hye-su's face grimaces at seeing the exploded head. But her stomach must have gotten stronger since last time because she doesn't vomit.

"Uh, it really is a wolf human."

Says Joon-ho as he carefully taps the lycanthrope corpse with his foot.

"Where did one go?"

Kang Chun-seong asks the question.

Then we realize that there are but only two corpses. Surprised at seeing lycanthropes for the first time, we hadn't thought of it.

-Meow.

With her front paw, Sylph points ahead. It must be the direction the surviving one took off in.

'Ah!'

I finally realize the situation.

"The remaining one must have used a corpse as a shield and run off."

"It's intelligent."

Says Kang Chun-seong. I agree with his words.

From a lycanthrope's point of view, a weapon like a gun will have been the first exposure of its kind to it. To think of using a corpse as a shield in that situation, it is a decision that would be impossible unless it was intelligent.

"Oppa, now what do we do?"

"Hm..."

I am quiet in my thoughts.

Since one got away, there is a high chance it will return with its group for revenge. They said lycanthropes are good at combat.

But the bastard that made it out alive will have fully recognized the power of the rifle. It won't be able to just barge on us. Considering its senses are like a wolf's...

At the end of my pondering, I make a decision.

"Let's keep going. We have to go through their territory anyway."

"Okay."

"Okay, hyung."

"After suffering from the gun, they won't be able to hastily attack us. But as it gets darker there is a high chance they may attack in the night, so for now let's hurry and find a safe location."

Our footsteps become faster than usual.

I use Sylph to scout and search for a safe location like a cave.

But a location doesn't turn up and after wandering for a long while, we discover a marshy swamp. It looks like it started as a small lake and developed into a swamp.

"The day is getting dark so let's spend the night here."

"Will this be okay?"

Asks Hye-su with an anxious expression.

I point to the swamp and speak.

"The bastards won't be able to cross the swamp, so we'll back up towards it and look at the other directions."

"But we won't be able to run through it either."

As Joon-ho points this out, I reply.

"Even if we run, don't you think they'll catch up to us quickly?"

"Ah..."

"We have to let go of the notion of making a run for it from the get go. Only think of winning the fight."

"Yes, hyung."

We set up a fire and arrange sentry duty, but I am nervous and cannot fall asleep. Without Sylph, we won't know the bastards are near until they are close.

I eventually end up falling asleep and waking up from the anxiety, repeatedly.

In the midst of it, every time I awoke, I summoned Sylph to scout and fell back asleep, and not a while later, woke up again and repeated the same thing again.

I was doing so when a thought pops into my head.

'Ah, majeong!'

They said all the organisms in Arena have majeong within their bodies. That should include lycanthropes.

I had completely forgotten.

'How could I forget that. I could've have gotten money and sold it, what a waste.'

But at this point, I don't have the intention to return to where the corpses are to collect the majeong.

'Next time, I won't forget, and I'll collect it for sure.'



Atop a hill where the moonlight shined bright, a hundred and some lycanthropes are assembled.

In the middle of a round circle of the gathered swarm, one lycanthrope was on his knees.

It's Helgi.

Beside Helgi is the corpse of the dongsaeng who had his head blown off.

Not knowing what, the men and the women gather around, and Helgi has his head held low, keeping his silence.

"What happened?"

"The Maria brothers died. They all died except for Helgi."

"Really? By who?"

"A human."

"A human? Really?"

"Haha, if that's the truth, that Helgi bastard won't have any honor to speak of."

"You saying the brothers all suffered at the hands of a prey like humans? That Helgi, now that I see him, was he just pretending to be strong but he really isn't that much at all?"

From here and there, come in the criticisms and ridicules. There is no way Helgi, with his sensitive lycanthrope senses, is not hearing all this.

But Helgi doesn't get up in anger and instead remains sitting quietly.

But then,

"Shh, quiet."

"He's here."

At the appearance of one lycanthrope, the whole group falls silent.

A beast that boasts the grandest build, walking erect.

From his shining silver fur that covers his body, there are scars printed in like medals.

He is Helgi's father and leader of the clan.

The father strides to the edge of the cliff and sits atop a boulder. Everyone respects and fears him. He is the monarch on his throne.

The father opens his mouth.

"What has happened?"

Helgi shuts his eyes and grits his teeth and answers.

"My brothers lost to a human."

Chapter 37

Lycanthrope (Part 3)

“Lost to a human?”

The fathers face is clouded in suspicion.

From amongst the clan, the faint sound of the giggle of men can be heard.

Helgi pays no heed to it and speaks.

“I do not know how many of them there are. We didn’t even see a face and three of them lost in an instant. I am sorry, father.”

The intermittent laughter from around, suddenly stops.

In this place there is not a single man that likes Helgi. It is because within the clan, all men compete for rank and women.

But that doesn’t mean they deny his strength.

If this Helgi returned without a chance to fight and after losing his brothers, that is not a problem to pass by, scoffing it off as incompetence.

Three of them died, but none even saw the opponent’s face? Something serious is happening here.

“You did not even see a face? That is insufficient information.”

At his father’s words, Helgi gestures to his dongsaeng’s corpse beside him.

“That is why I brought the body of my brother.”

He flips over his dongsaeng’s corpse and shows him the back.

“Something small flew faster than wind and lodged itself. The human is using a strange

weapon that can target opponents from a far distance."

"Inspect the body."

"Yes."

Helgi inspects his dongsaeng's corpse. He puts his hand inside the wound in the back and fishes around. Then, something comes into Helgi's hand.

He takes it out and shows it to his father. It is a small crunched up piece of metal.

"You say something this small flew faster than wind?"

"Yes, father."

"It has a dangerous weapon."

"I am not positive, but my guess is there is also a summoned spirit."

A cold silence finds them.

An unknown weapon that slayed Helgi's brothers in an instant. And a summoned spirit too.

The human that stepped foot into their territory this time is not to be taken lightly.

"First, we should know who this human is and how many there are."

"Father, I will go and find out!"

Out of the blue, one lycanthrope bursts out from the clan with confidence.

'Jason?'

Helgi's face becomes distorted.

Jason is the most in competition with Helgi amongst his different mothered brothers.

Seeing Helgi's return from failure in this incidence, Jason quickly volunteered himself. It's clearly a tactic to check himself on Helgi.

"Do so."

Father doesn't seem to really care who takes this job.

"Thank you! I will!"

Jason departs gleefully. The brothers from Jason's mother follow behind him.

"This isn't good.'

Helgi's expression becomes shadowed.

In the clan his father reigns over, lycanthropes normally center on a maternal line and form factions.

Up to now, Helgi and his brothers who are from their fathers first wife, Maria, have been holding power, but with this incident, everyone but Helgi has died.

On top of it all, there are seven brothers from Hera, the third wife.

If they succeed in this task too, they may use this to have Jason rise to the second in command.

Of course, personal strength is more important than factions, but even compared to Helgi, Jason isn't weak. If they were to fight, Helgi would have to prepare for possible death for this rival.

'But nothing is definite yet. Jason is impatient so he may spoil the job.'

They will definitely succeed in at least the scouting. They just have to approach to a visible range.

But after succeeding in the scouting, what if Jason gets greedy and attacks the humans?

The picture of the human counterattacking and inflicting large damage draws itself naturally.

For the clan as a whole, losing members is not a good thing, but for Helgi, the fall of his rival is the best outcome.

'I guess I should hope that this Jason bastard dies.'

Helgi anticipates Jason's reckless bravado.



"Haha, did you say Helgi's face scrunch up?"

"It looked like he was chewing shit."

Jason's brothers snort.

"Losing to a human and returning, he should know he's embarrassed. Humph, he strutted enough all that time and now Helgi's limit is reached."

Jason slandered Helgi plenty and his brothers agreed.

Father's rule of the clan was already going on 26 years.

From their father's rule, the silver clan's long history saw a lot of change.

The most marked change was the clan's growth.

In the history of the clan, there was never a lycanthrope as strong as father. No one could challenge father.

Not only that, but father forbid unnecessary rank struggles within the clan.

Challenges and rank fights didn't occur so men's death rates greatly declined and due to that, the clan's numbers increased.

Father also found a way to procure food without hunting. That was a remarkable innovation. Without difficultly wandering the terrain and hunting, they were able to easily obtain food.

As food became plentiful, the clan became ever prosperous. The clan that was no more than 20 members is now stronger than 100.

At first there was a lot of dissatisfaction at father's strange policies but now, everyone praises him. They say he brought prosperity to the Silver clan.

But internal dissent still exists.

And brother Jason is the prime example.

'A lycanthrope is always about strength! Rank must be decided with strength. Kissing father's ass and raising rank, that's wrong!'

Jason had a lot of pity for Helgi.

He never thought that his strength fell behind that of Helgi.

But Helgi's quick wit and intelligence enabled him to cleanly carry out his father's commands, and thick headed Jason couldn't do so. Because of this, the position of the clan had no choice but to follow Helgi.

Up until a little while ago.

'Now is the chance.'

Father's governing style is wrong.

The clan's numbers have grown but the men have lost courage and become weak.

Since not having to hunt to live, their senses have diminished, leading to losing to the likes of a human.

Jason's thoughts are like this.

'We have to return to the way it was before. I will do that.'

He, of course, has no intention of challenging father. Because he's too strong.

But he just needs to squash his strongest rival, Helgi.

Even monstrous father will age in due time! If he can quash Helgi, the next leader is him.

"Let's obliterate the humans who dared step foot into our land."

"What?"

“You want to obliterate them?”

The brothers are alarmed at Jason’s outburst.

“Jason, our order was to scout. Father didn’t say for us to fight.”

“Yeah.”

“And these are dangerous humans who have a strange weapon. What if we hastily attack and in reverse, we get attacked?”

“Even the Helgi brothers suffered.”

“Helgi brothers what?”

As Jason suddenly starts to growl, the brothers are started. Jason is flaming angry.

“You saying because the Helgi brothers couldn’t do it that we won’t be able to?!”

“No, no, what I was saying...”

“You coward!”

“Kek...! Kek...!”

Jason grips and twists a brother’s neck.

“Listen well! We will hunt all the human bastards that brutally murdered Helgi’s brothers. When we return after such a huge success, father, who trusted in the kinds of Helgi, will change his mind a bit, I’m sure. He will realize that in turn for our clan’s prosperity, we have become too weak!”

“Kek...! Ah, okay...!”

Jason flings his brother down. Then he walks ahead briskly.

“Let’s go. First we have to sniff out the scent of where the humans are.”



“This won’t do.”

I can barely sleep due to the anxiety so I decide to take a countermeasure.

“Let’s switch night and day.”

I report to the teammates.

Everyone is puzzled so I continue with an explanation.

“Lycanthropes are nocturnal so there’s a high chance they will attack at night. In addition to that, night is when we are sleeping and our field of vision is restricted.”

“You are saying we should sleep in the day.”

I nod at Kang Chun-seong’s words.

“Yes, if we sleep in the brightest parts of the day, it will be more beneficial to the sentry than at night. And in the darkness of night we can frequently summon Sylph and move.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“I agree too.”

Hye-su and Joon-ho agree.

Kang Chun-seong nods his head and agrees to it.

We have a simple breakfast and move, and when the sun hits about midday, we decide to sleep.

We sleep under our cloaks under the shade of a tree and because none of us slept well from the anxiety, we easily fall asleep even in the middle of the day.

There is no need to build a fire so its two birds with one stone. We now won’t draw the lycanthropes to us by firelight either.

But as the sun descends, a difficult march begins. We have to endure the discomfort of limited vision, and keep moving.

After some deliberating, I set Kang Chun-seong up front. With a physical strength buff intermediate level 1 and aura control entry level 5, Kang Chun-seong has the best senses and, even at night, maneuvers well using all five senses.

After that, Joon-ho and Hye-su follow, and I take position at the end.

Kang Chun-seong alerted us to every rock or protruding branch and fulfilled his role well.

I frequently summoned Sylph to scout the surrounding 1.2 km.

'There's no way we just pass like this. They'll definitely come back for revenge.'

They are bound not to be so weak as to not attack due to a fear of the gun. Would an exam be this easy?

'Last night, there was no attack from the enemy. It is proof that they are vigilant. They are probably thinking of being prudent.'

Precisely, they are being cautious about the power of the gun I carry. They won't have ever seen a weapon like this, so they must be thoroughly alarmed.

If so, there won't be an imminent large scale attack.

'For now, they must be spying.'

A wolf is a very intelligent animal, and more so, they said the lycanthrope has an intelligence equal to humans.

For now, they will send a few to spy on us.

They will try to discover how many of us there are, and the identity of the strange long distance weapon.

Long distance weapon, they'll even want to know the Mosin-Nagant's shooting range. An attack will follow after they thoroughly know those things.

If so, we cannot give them that information easily.

We have to interrupt and disturb their spying.

'Okay.'

I think up a trap.

"Sylph."

-Meow?

"Is there a strong or peculiar smelling plant or fruit near to us that can hide our body order/scent?"

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head.

"Bring it to me please."

Sylph flits away, flying.

Perhaps 5 minutes have passed?

Sylph comes back with a bunch of something that looks like mug wort. I bring it close to my nose and sniff and it wafts a pungent smell.

"This will work'

I move to execute my plan.

"Sylph, will you erase our scent for 20 minutes? Make it so our scent isn't where we passed by."

-Meow.

Sylph nods in understanding.

Then I share with the group the plant that Sylph brought.

“In 20 minutes, plan to smoosh this and rub it into your clothes.”

“What are you planning?”

At Hye-su’s question, I answer.

“The bastards will probably be tracking us through scent. They will get how many of us there are and at what distance by using their smell.”

“You want to erase our scent to distract them?”

Asks Joon-ho.

“It is impossible to give them the slip. But if our scent disappears, the bastards might feel flustered.”

I grin and continue speaking.

“Since it will be hard to tell with their smell, they will get close to tell with their eyes. Let’s catch them all then.”

Chapter 38

The Secluded Village (Part 1)

The Jason brothers discovered the traces of the humans' camp at the marshy swamp.

It's a place they had lingered at for quite a while and the scent they left behind was quite strong.

"There's four."

"I think one is a female."

"Seeing as how the scent is still strong, they camped here last night."

The brothers stick their noses here and there and imprint the scent of their prey in their minds. Now that they know the scent, the hunt is as good as half over.

Jason looked around his surroundings and looked to the direction where were are footsteps.

"They are moving west."

"Then they are going entirely straight through our clan's domain?"

"What are these bastards doing?"

"Seriously, where did they come from?"

The brothers tilt their heads.

The silver clan thoroughly guards their territory. Not even a mouse could enter without them knowing about it.

What's more, humans, with their lacking olfactory and auditory senses, don't have the skill to evade the silver clans' surveillance.

But from the center of the forest, unidentified humans just appeared out of nowhere.

Where did these humans come from?

"They most definitely did not enter through our territory. Then did they perhaps enter the forest by cutting through the troll's territory?"

Jason recalled the trolls that reside in the northern part of the forest, and thought probably not.

Trolls are strong and atrocious. Even the silver clan that had pushed out the red apes and dominated the western part of the forest, tended to avoid conflict with the trolls.

"If they really crossed through the troll domain, they are not some ordinary humans."

"I think we have to be careful of these ones."

"Yeah, the Helgi brothers won't have lost just to anything."

At the brothers' mention of the Helgi brothers, Jason started to get annoyed.

"Let's go."

"...?"

"Even so, they are humans. Once it is night, humans are no different than being blind."

"Yeah."

"That's true."

The Jason brothers started to chase the groups traces.

They chased, following the footsteps, but the most important thing is the scent that was left at every spot they pass.

Using how much scent was left, they determined how long ago they were there. This way, they could tell just now fast their hunting targets were moving.

The Jason brothers matched their speed to the human groups and slowly started to

catch up.

There was no need to rush.

While the sun is up, it is better to keep a certain distance. Since the humans have a strange long distance weapon.

They can catch up at night when the humans are asleep. Jason was planning on eliminating all the humans at that time.

The Jason brothers leisurely tracked the humans.

It's the silver clan's territory anyway.

It's a chase happening on their front lawn, so the Jason brothers could just close their eyes and still pursue them. They could clearly guess the outcome of the human group.

But...

"Huh?"

Amongst the brothers, one of them makes a confused noise.

The other brothers too.

Confusion brushes by on Jason's face too.

"The scent is gone?"

"The bastards' scent is suddenly gone!"

"How can this happen?"

"It doesn't make sense that the smell just stops."

The brothers are flustered at this occurrence that has never happened before. Jason too is flustered but he reassured his brothers.

"The footsteps are clearly present. I don't know what trick they played but for now, let's chase."

“Think it’ll be okay?”

“Something feels wrong.”

The brothers look nervous.

When chasing prey, relying heavily on smell is a characteristic of the lycanthrope, and chasing prey whose scent has suddenly disappeared, is uncomfortable.

Jason growls.

“Then? You want to just turn back? Should we tell father we just returned because we got scared the scent disappeared?!?”

“No, no.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

The brothers are intimidated and follow Jason.

For a while, the situation continued where they tracked the scent, but suddenly the scent disappeared and they were forced to track the human group by looking at their footsteps.

But as 20 minutes pass, a strange smell wafts from the tracks of the human group.

“This is the smell of a weed.”

“These humans are playing a strange trick.”

This time, a pungent smell wafts everywhere to the point that they cannot smell the human group’s scent.

Just what secret design are the humans planning, the Jason brothers’ confusion grows bigger.

But there is no doubt that this weed smell is a trace left by the human group.

The Jason brothers have no choice but to use the footprints and weed smell to continue tracking.

They continue tracking like this for a while.

The day brightens and the sun is high and center.

The Jason brothers halt tracking for a moment.

It is because from not far off, the smell of the weed hangs in the air.

It means the human group has stopped, not far away.

“Hyung, what should we do?”

“I think the humans have stopped.”

“They must be eating or something.”

“Damn, that pungent weed smell is all the way over here.”

The brothers ramble on and exchange opinions.

Judging from the weed smell, there is no doubt that the human group is resting not far from here.

It's still broad daylight.

They could be found out if they approach the humans any closer in such bright light.

“The bastards have that strange weapon that killed Helgi’s brothers. Shouldn’t we wait to approach until night when they will be asleep?”

One brother offers up a suggestion.

Jason agrees that the suggestion is a good idea.

“Okay. We’ll wait and rest here until the bastards move.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll go hunt for something to eat.”

"Let's go together."

The brothers who had been tracking since dawn without so much as a morsel to eat all day, scattered in search of food.

The lycanthrope brothers, being the evolved hunters that they are, quickly catch an elk.

Jason approaches the elk his brothers caught and with one hand, crushes its neck.

Kwaduk!

With a terrifying noise, the elk is killed.

Jason ferociously bites into the elk's neck and drinks the fresh blood that explodes from it.

The brothers swallow in hunger and await their turns.

As seven big lycanthropes dive in, it only takes a few moments before the elk is reduced to nothing but bones.

They finish their meal and their bellies are full and the Jason brothers return their attentions to the human group.

"The smell is just as it was."

"They are still close. They still haven't moved."

"Have they still not finished eating?"

The strong weed smell continues to hang in the air.

After some consideration, the Jason brothers decide to wait it out a little longer.

As long as the humans are in their territory, they may as well be in the palm of their hands. That's how they thought.

But time passed and the weed smell didn't disappear at all, the Jason brothers begin to question.

"Why aren't they moving?"

"The humans' movements is strange."

"That they still aren't moving, aren't they being too laid back about this? Do they not know whose territory they are in?"

Have they finished their meal and are casually taking a nap?

Have they not caught on at all that they are being chased?

The main questions make the Jason brothers feel confused.

"This won't do."

Jason picks the youngest out of his brothers.

"You go look for yourself."

"What? Me?"

The youngest brother's face became clearly distorted.

"You afraid?"

Asks Jason with a threatening expression.

The youngest brother's expression looks like he just ate shit.

He doesn't want to be treated as a pussy but with Jason strong-arming him, he doesn't have much of a choice.

"Okay. I'll go, jeez."

The youngest mumbles as he goes.

The youngest follows the humans' footsteps for about an hour and pants as he returns.

"What happened?"

At Jason's question, the youngest quickly shouts.

"We've been had!"

"What?"

"Come see for yourself!"

The Jason brothers go with their youngest to the scene.

The second he saw the scene, Jason felt preposterous. And then despondent...

And lastly, a rising rage he cannot control.

"These insect-like bastards!"

At the scene, there is no evidence to suggest that the humans had rested there.

Just a bunch of discarded weeds that had been crushed with rocks to spread its putrid smell.

Because of that weed smell, the Jason brothers had thought that the humans had stopped here and wasted a lot of time.

"They tricked us into waiting here and moved far away."

Jason concludes that the human definitely used trickery and then ran far away.

"Let's hurry. We have to catch up to them by nightfall."

"Okay!"

The Jason brothers hurry and begin to race.

Having been tricked like idiots by humans that are mere prey, their pride was deeply hurt and the brothers raced with blinders on.



We came to learn around lunchtime, that there were seven lycanthropes on our tail.

In their minds, they thought they were keeping the distance as to not get caught, but they were found by Sylph and her wide scouting range.

I put my plan into action.

The first step was to discard about half of the weeds we had been holding onto.

According to my plan, the lycanthropes weren't able to easily approach due to the strong stench of the weed.

Using that time, we moved far away and slept.

Knowing that the bastards would be tricked by the weed smell and not be chasing us, we were able to sleep at ease and rest.

-Meow!

At the last sentry, Sylph finished her scouting and returned.

With her front paw, Sylph pointed behind her. It seems the bastards have now realized they were tricked and are chasing again. I'm sure they're pissed?

I quickly wake Joon-ho, Hye-su, and Kang Chun-seong.

"Wake up. We have to go now."

"Hyung, what are you going to do now?"

"We will see a winner tonight."

Due to the weed smell disturbing their olfactory senses, the lycanthropes have lost their sense of distance.

Having been tricked by me, they will be in all the more of a hurry.

Tonight, the bastards will daringly approach us.

We have to set up a trap and wait, then kill them all.

“I’ll be bait.”

The one who volunteered himself is none other than Kang Chun-seong.

“There is no need for that. We can lure them with the clothes that have our scent and the weed scent on them.”

“That may be for their sense of smell, but how will you trick their hearing? Our opponent is not a wolf, but intelligent.”

“Ah...”

Kang Chun-seong is right.

If the lycanthropes get close but don’t hear any sound, they will feel that something is off. They have already been tricked once so now they will be more vigilant.

“Will you be alright?”

“It won’t be a problem. I wanted to fight them to see just how strong they are. I can also see how strong I have become.”

Indeed, Kang Chun-seong has guts like no other.

He didn’t even get nervous confronting a 19th turn veteran and even let down some teaching on the man.

“Then, thank you. You just have to catch them.”

How far did we walk.

Evening passed and the sky began to grow dark.

We kept walking and as the sun completely disappeared, we moved on with the plan.

Including our capes, we took our garments with our body odors on them and gather them in one place. Kang Chun-seong pretended to be asleep on top of the garments.

In our battle suits and boots, we wait not far off.

“Weapon.”

The Mosin-Nagant appears, falling into my right hand.

“Here, oppa.”

Hye-su takes out 7.62 mm bullets from her bag.

I load the Mosin-Nagant and get everything ready.

Now all there is left to do, is wait for the bastards to come.

Chapter 39

The Silver Village (Part 2)

“I can smell them.”

Says one of the brothers as he sniffs the air.

Jason too concentrates on his sense of smell and nods.

“Definitely. The putrid weed smell is mixed in but a vague human smell is there.”

Jason grinds his teeth.

“Let’s go. And kill them all.”

“We should still be careful.”

“They have that strange weapon.”

“I already know!”

The Jason brothers begin to carefully approach the place where the humans have stalled.

They quiet their breaths and approach without a sound.

As they get closer, the body odor of the humans gets stronger.

They finally succeed in getting close enough to the humans to check them out with their eyes.

One male human is visible.

Perhaps he is on sentry duty because he is sitting in place. The others are hard to see but it looks like they are laying down, asleep.

The brothers look to Jason. They're looking as if to ask, what now.

"There is only one that is awake."

The male human that is awake is not holding on to any weapon.

At that level, it is a good chance to just fight. Actually, it would be an overwhelming victory.

This is the golden opportunity to kill all the humans that Helgi couldn't do anything about and ran from. Jason is not one to lose on such an opportunity.

'How dare they tricked me! Mere humans!'

Jason raises his claws sharply.

The brothers follow suit and change into fighting stance. With a fight imminent, a wild bloodthirst begins to ebb.

"Grrr!"

Finally, Jason attacks.

The first to target is of course, the awake sentry, the visible human male.

He goes in right away and slashes around his claws. It would only be a moment to slit one male human's throat.

But the male human, as if he had been waiting, moves his body to the right, avoiding the attack. All the more, as the human escapes by rolling on the ground, he kicks Jason's leg and makes him lose his balance.

Puk!

"Kuk!"

At an unexpected counterattack, the careless Jason stumbles.

The brothers that came out at the same time and attacked, had no effect in startling the man.

'Something is wrong!'

An uneasy feeling passes Jason's mind. Then...

Tang!



"Shoot!"

As I give my order, Sylph pulls the trigger.

Tang!

At the same time a spark appears at the end of the Mosin-Nagant, a 'Ggaeng!' sounding scream spreads.

Click!

Sylph pulls the bolt back and forth and gets rid of the cartridge. Then she pulls the trigger, all of this was done incredibly swiftly.

Tang- puk!

Every time the sound of the shot goes off, a lycanthrope falls.

Click, tang!

"Khung!"

Click, tang!

"Ggaeng!"

Sylph is like a machine, sending continuous shots with repetitive motions.

If I had been the one holding this gun, I would not be this swift.

The night is dark so only vague silhouettes can be seen, but I can tell the lycanthropes are incredibly flustered.

“Run away!”

It's the first time hearing a lycanthropes voice.

I'm shocked.

“They really talk like humans!”

I'm shocked that they speak like humans with the face of an animal, and I'm shocked again that we can understand them.

It's a language I hear for the first time, yet I am able to understand it.

“Hyung, the bastards are running away!”

At Joon-ho's yell, I get my head together.

Having all been shot dead in mere moments, there are only three lycanthropes left, and they begin to run away.

As they do so, Kang Chun-seong, who had been only defending amongst the center of lycanthropes, moves deliberately.

He deftly lands a low kick to a lycanthrope, toppling it.

“Krrrrng!”

The fallen lycanthrope yells out as he aimlessly flails his claws about in resistance.

Kang Chun-seong completely avoids the fierce attack, using the opening to precisely land a slap.

Puk!

“Kuhung!”

With a critical blow to the chest, the lycanthrope lets out a pained moan. Shocked at his pain, the lycanthrope lets out a sound like a beast and haphazardly slashes with his claws. It looks like it will only take a second to turn Kang Chun-seong into rags.

But Kang Chun-seong is cool-headed.

He doesn't back off but stands firm. He smoothly swishes both arms and turns the lycanthrope resistance into nothing.

He then digs in again and lands another blow to the chest!

Bbuk!

"Kuhung!"

Without restraint he continues to pound.

With screams, the lycanthrope begins to vomit blood.

'Good. Now there's only two left.'

I hand over a five bullet clip to Sylph and make an order.

"Sylph, chase them down and shoot them all."

-Meow!

Sylph holds the Mosin-Nagant and flies away like the wind.



Jason is stricken in fear.

He can't understand it.

Tang, every time that piercing noise spread out, a brother's head blew up.

He has never seen the respectable lycanthropes of the silver clan die in such futility.

'It was real! This is why Helgi had no choice but to flee!'

To think that he too might have died in such futility, a terror sweeps over him.

Jason flees.

There is only one brother left.

Then...

Tang-

Once again the resounding hair-ringing sound.

Jason doesn't look back, and runs. He keeps running, panting, and he realized that no one was around him.

The younger sibling that he was fleeing with was not there.

The only one left was Jason.

'I want to live! I have to live!'

A million thoughts pass through his head. All the desires he sought in life, all became useless.

Jason realizes the sweetest desire is just the hope of survival.

He should have realized the danger after seeing the Helgi brothers' defeat. He shouldn't have been careless because humans are like mere prey.

He fell for a transparent trick and was completely had and because of it, in his rage, he rushed into the situation and it was a mistake. He shouldn't have done so.

But now, the time to regret had already passed.

Taang!

A dead sound and shock is felt in his head, and with it, Jason's vision went pitch dark like the depths of hell.



Bajijik!

Kang Chun-seong lands a final blow to the lycanthrope's head.

With the terrifying sound of a skull getting crushed, the lycanthrope fell over like a puppet with its strings cut.

At the same time, Sylph returned. With two cute front paws, holding the Mosin-Nagant that is much larger than herself, she stares at me with round eyes. It's as if her expression is asking me if she did well.

"You did good, Sylph."

I pet Sylph's head. Sylph rubs her head in my palm and licks it.

The fight is over and I start off by gathering the lycanthrope corpses into one spot.

"Let's look for majeong."

At my words, Joon-ho and Hye-su make a shocked expression.

"That, um, we have to search the bodies, right?"

At Joon-ho's question, I nod my head.

"I think so."

"Ugh..."

Joon-ho can't fathom it.

That's completely understandable. Even though we have been made examinees and gotten used to rough things, we haven't gotten so used to it to dig through corpses.

Contrarily, Hye-su speaks up.

"Oppa, I'll do it."

"You?"

"Yeah, leave it to me."

Hye-su summons her sword.

Then she approaches the lycanthrope corpses.

Shot by a gun so their heads so that their heads have exploded, the image of their dead bodies is extremely grotesque. Hye-su summons up her courage and stabs a lycanthrope with her sword.

Pook!

Joon-ho, who was watching, flinches.

With a shaking hand, Hye-su makes an accurate incision along the lycanthrope's abdomen.

And into the incised space where blood is spilling out, she puts in her hand.

Seeing this, I can feel it. How hard Hye-su is working to become stronger. Volunteering herself for nasty work is proof of that.

"Hyung, I'll do it too. Weapon!"

Joon-ho too summons his javelin and starts to dissect another lycanthrope.

"Oppa, I found it!"

Hye-su finds it first, and shows me a round marble looking thing, wet in blood.

A round marble with a yellow color.

This is the majeong they said that all living things in Arena carry within their bodies.

Cha Ji-hye had shown us a sample of majeong in the research center, and this one is a bit smaller than that sample, but I have no doubt about it.

"I found it too, Hyung! It was near its belly button."

Joon-ho too shows me the majeong he has found.

"Okay, now leave it to me."

I use Sylph.

Sylph uses the knife wind to simply extract the majeong.

We gather seven majeong and decide to store it in Hye-su's item bag. There isn't sufficient space so I take out the bullets and shove them into my pockets.

"Hyung, if we sell these to the research center, how much do you think we'll get for them?"

"I don't know. Anyway, let's move. We have to hurry. Other lycanthropes will have heard the shooting sounds."

"Okay."

We begin walking again.



In the middle of Gangnam, Seoul, there is a towering building.

This skyscraper has two words, Jin Seong, largely written into it, and this building is headquarters for this Jin Seong Group.

At its top floor, an aged man, in his early 70's, is sitting and looking down at the city view from out his window.

He looks down at the city buildings that appear tiny like toys, and this elderly man's gaze is a look of lonely remorse.

"Chairman."

A middle-aged man's voice can be heard from behind, calling the elderly man.

Chairman of The Jin Seong Group, born as the son of a poor farmer who holds the Republic of Korea's biggest wealth and honor, Chairman Park Jin-Seong, turns around.

Chairman Park Jin-Seong asks.

"Have you found out about it?"

"Yes, through a personal connection within the research center, I have found it."

“Show it to me.”

The middle aged man with a thin and sharp impression, spreads out a stack of photos onto the desk.

The background is an army heliport.

It's a photo of four young men and women getting into a helicopter.

It was taken secretly with a poor camera on a smartphone by a troop affiliated executive.

There are photos of the four peoples' faces precisely focused in.

The middle-aged man then proceeds to show the files with their profiles.

“They are newly recruited examinees at the research center, known as the Kim Hyun-ho team.”

“Which one is Kim Hyun-ho?”

“This young man.”

The middle-aged man presents the photo of Kim Hyun-ho closer to Chairman Park Jin-seong.

“This fellow is the leader?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of lad is he?”

“They say he is composed and a good decision maker. More so, he has a very special main skill.”

“What kind?”

“I do not know. I said I could offer more money but the source refused, saying it's impossible to say more.”

“And the others?”

“This examinee, Kang Chun-seong, is worth noting.”

He presents the photo of Kang Chun-seong and continues his explanation.

“His skills are average, but he is extremely capable, a martial artist from China. I was told he is on his 3rd turn but has the skills to surpass a 6th turn examinee.”

“Huh, is that so?”

“Yes, it doesn’t seem to be an exaggeration.”

“Hm...”

Chairman Park Jin-seong looks at the photo of Kang Chun-seong, and then looks again at the photo of Kim Hyun-ho.

“This fellow, Kim Hyun-ho, what did he originally do?”

“Age is 29. After graduating college, he didn’t have a particular job record, and was in the middle of preparing for the civil servant exam when he suddenly quit it all and moved back to where his family lives in Cheonan.”

“Tsk tsk, how is it he never got to live a proper life before dying and suffering such hardships as this.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong clicks his tongue, as if to portray his compassion, as he stares at the photo.

It is a plain face, but warm. Like his first son’s young days.

Chapter 40

The Silver Village (Part 3)

“How did it go?”

Asked the father.

Helgi is out of breath from having run so feverishly, and he catches his breath as he replies.

“Everyone was dead, father.”

At those words, the gathered lycanthropes become largely agitated all together.

“Aaaak! NOOO!”

One female lycanthrope collapsed to the floor and screamed. She was the mother of the Jason brothers, the third wife, Hera.

At the news that all seven sons, and even Jason, whom she had such high expectations for, had died, Hera became completely shocked and broke down crying.

“It’s a lie! What about Jason? Jason is dead too? Did you see?”

“I saw Jason’s corpse. It looked like he was hit in the head by the human’s weapon and died from it.”

Helgi replies coolly. At those words, Hera grabbed her head and wailed.

Then.

“Shut up.”

The father’s low voice spreads out.

Hera’s cries suddenly stop. With a frightened face, she looked at her husband.

“You can birth more sons. You are distracting me, so go.”

“Hu hu huk.” (sobbing noises)

Hera sorrowfully wept as she left the crowd and disappeared to a quiet place.

The father looked at Helgi again.

“Where have the bastards gone?”

“They made to the west. If they keep going this way, about tomorrow, they will arrive at the human village.”

“You mean *that* village.”

Father shuts his eyes for a moment.

He ponders on how to eradicate these impudent humans who had killed ten of his sons.

Then he speaks.

“We will proceed as usual”

“As usual?”

Helgi asks again. Father nods his head.

“Let them go to that village.”



We walk all night and without knowing, the day begins to brighten.

“Hyung, look over there!”

Suddenly, Joon-ho points ahead and yells. A dense fog has settled in and it is hard to make out what is ahead.

But at Joon-ho’s words I stare intently and indeed, something strange can be seen.

I don't believe my eyes.

"A village?"

Yes.

A village where people are living. There is, of course, slash and burn farming, and even a farm with gathered cows and pigs can be seen.

I wouldn't have thought that in this forest inhabited by lycanthropes, a village with people could be found.

"We're alive now!"

"People are living here, so we must be out of the forest now!"

Joon-ho and Hye-su are so happy they almost leap for joy.

But I can't shake off a suspicious feeling.

"This place is so close to the lycanthrope territory and there is a village with people? Something is off."

"Listen here, oppa. The village wall is extremely high. Couldn't that be to stop the lycanthropes?"

As Hye-su said, the village is built with a wooden fence rampart.

"...well, let's see. It might not be an average village, it could be a hideout for bandits, so be especially careful."

"Yes."

"Got it."

We cannot look at the world of Arena as the same as our 21st century world.

From what we have heard, Arena's human society is far lagging from our present world. Who's to know that the village people as a whole won't rob us entirely?

We approach the village carefully.

The village is enveloped completely by a wooden fence, but the main entrance to its inside is about halfway open.

Perhaps because it is still early dawn, I don't see any people.

But I decide to be thorough.

"Sylph."

-Meow?

Sylph appears in midair and sits softly atop my head.

"Check out the inside of the village."

-Meow!

Sylph becomes wind and enters the village.

Sylph returns quickly from the village and I ask her a question.

"Are people living there?"

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

"How many?"

Sylph draws a number 234 into the ground.

A population of 200 makes it a small village, but considering the village is situated in such a dangerous forest is impressive.

"Is everyone asleep?"

This time, she draws a number 28. It means 28 people are awake.

“I'll lead the way.”

Kang Chun-seong volunteers.

“Please, thank you.”

Kang Chun-seong stood in front and headed inside the village. We tag along behind him.

The atmosphere inside the village is ordinary.

There are wooden homes densely packed.

When we walked through the entrance, the first thing that catches my eye is a vacant lot that looks like a square.

In the center of the space is a well, and a woman drawing water from the well stares at us wide-eyed.

“Who, who are you?”

Asks the woman.

It's the same speech as the dead lycanthropes from last night. It sounds similar to Russian, and this time too, I am able to understand it.

“Hyung, you understood her too?”

At Joon-ho's question, I nod my head.

“I think it is because we are examinees.”

Hye-su is correct.

For smooth progress, it must be because we have been given the ability to understand the Arena's languages. Otherwise, this makes no sense at all.

“Um, well...”

The lady with a frightened face, asks us again.

I step forward and reply.

"Hello."

Surprisingly, it isn't Korean that comes out of my mouth, but the same language as the woman. The other teammates look surprised too.

"Who are you people?"

"We are travelers. We took the wrong road and wandered the forest when we found this village."

"Travelers? Of this forest?"

"Yes."

The woman looks like she can't believe it.

Then again, it is hard to believe we are travelers that wandered through a forest full of red apes and lycanthropes.

I paraphrase.

"Yes, while we were wandering we were attacked by lycanthropes and had quite a hard time."

As I say so, I carefully observe the woman's reaction.

"Ly-lycanthropes?"

I thoroughly watch the woman who has a sensitive reaction to the word 'lycanthrope.'

'I think she's afraid of lycanthropes. Should I up it?'

I speak.

"Ten of them attacked us at once so we eliminated them all. We're pretty strong."

The woman is completely surprised and I continue.

"Could we meet with the leader of this village? We would like to get permission to dwell here for a couple days. The lycanthropes fear us so you do not have to worry about them chasing us and attacking here."

At my words, the woman looks even more scared.

"Um, please hold on a moment. I will bring you the village chief."

The woman hastily runs off.

"Hyung, can we really bullshit our way here?"

Asks Joon-ho.

I shrug my shoulders.

"I did just to see how she'd react."

"And?"

Asks Hye-su.

"...it's a bit strange."

"Huh?"

"This village is a little weird. There is more than one suspicious thing here and there."

"Explain that."

Says Kang Chun-seong.

I reply.

"It's strange enough that a village is just plopped right in a lycanthrope infested forest, but the main entrance is open and no one is guarding."

"Ah...!"

"You're right."

Then Joon-ho and Hye-su and Kang Chun-seong look around the village and realize too, the oddity.

"You saw that woman's reaction, right? When I said we killed ten lycanthropes and that the bastards are scared of us, oddly enough, she became even more frightened."

"Maybe the lycanthropes changed into village people? They told us they can transform into humans."

Hye-so offers a possible explanation. I shake my head.

"Sylph said people are living here. That's right, right Sylph?"

-Meow.

Sylph wraps her tail around my neck and nods her head.

"Are you sure they are humans and not transformed from lycanthropes?"

Asks Hye-su.

Sylph nods her head.

If Sylph is this sure, there is no doubt.

Moreover, in this village are fields and ranches. It's hard to imagine lycanthropes farm and ranch.

A while later, some ten village men appear around us.

"Are you guys the travelers?"

Asked a white-bearded old man with a cane.

I answer.

"Yes, we are."

"I am this village's chief, Lebil."

Lebil? What a strange name. Is this a name that is common in the Arena world?

"We are travelers that just travel here and there. We wish to rest here for just one day, will you grant us permission?"

"You say you fought lycanthropes?"

"Yes, things like those aren't much."

"Hoho, impressive indeed. I say, our village has been greatly bothered by those things. Fellows as strong as you are always welcome."

"Thank you."

"There is an empty house so it will not be in inconvenience for you to stay a few days. I will escort you, follow me."

"Yes."

"Now now, leave it to me and go back to your business."

The chief dispersed the ten or so men that came out with him.

The men scatter, and we follow chief Lebil and walk through the village.

"Isn't it strange?"

The chief asked randomly.

"What do you mean?"

"Isn't it strange that a village is located here?"

"Oh, yes, I thought it strange indeed. That a village is in such a dangerous forest."

"Hahaha, yes, the beasts and monsters from the village are dangerous. But do you know what is scarier?"

"I don't know."

“Taxes.”

The chief lets out a sigh and continues speaking.

“There is nothing as scary as a murderous tax. Lycanthropes are better than a cruel (feudal) lord. All the people in this village are people that ran away and hid from the lord’s tyranny.”

“You must have all suffered greatly.”

“Un-conveyable with words. Harvesting with slash-and-burn farming, raising pigs and cattle, fighting with lycanthropes, our struggles are endless.”

‘That last part is a lie.’

At the end of my deciphering, I make that conclusion.

I believe it is true that this village was made from people fleeing tyranny.

But going head to head and fighting with lycanthropes seems doubtful.

I had noted the men that had appeared with the chief earlier, and not a single one was properly weaponized.

‘I will wait and see.’

I have to find out what this elderly chief Lebil is planning.

I think that they have a certain relationship with the lycanthropes.

I have to find out this village’s identity and why they are lying.

“Okay, this is it. It’s decent, eh?”

The chief shows us a crude building built of wood plants. Well, it is better than sleeping on the floor.

“We thank you for your goodwill.”

I express my gratitude to the chief one more time.

"If there is anything you need, please let me know."

The chief smiled pleasantly and left.

We are left to ourselves and Hye-su furrows her brows and speaks.

"Oppa, do you think it will be okay to stay here? Like you said, this village feels odd."

"After what you said, hyung, I've been noticing a couple strange things too. Wouldn't it be better for us to not stay at a village like this and just keep going?"

Hye-su and Joon-ho feel uneasy about this village. Kang Chun-seong hasn't said anything but he is of the same opinion.

I speak.

"Like you guys are saying, this village is suspicious. But we have to pause at this village."

Everyone looks doubtful. Like they're asking me why.

I say.

"Let's say we just pass this village and keep going the way we were going. You think we can evade the lycanthropes chasing us?"

"..."

"...I guess not. They are a lot faster than we are."

Yep.

My conclusion is the same.

"Then think. With our pace, we can't evade the lycanthropes and it's too much to fight every time we get attacked. The bastards aren't stupid either so now they won't be careless and they'll come attack in bigger groups."

The Mosin-Nagant isn't an automatic gun that can spray bullets and we have limited ammunition.

“But they won’t have given us an impossible mission. Somewhere, there is for sure a hint to clearing this mission and I think that hint is in this village.”

Chapter 41

The Ranch (Part 1)

We killed three in the first fight and killed seven in the second fight. How will the lycanthropes, who have similar intellect as humans, react to this?

After suffering such fatalities, they won't remain careless, and in the least, might they not come attacking in scores?

In that case, even if we were to walk fast, there is no way for us to evade the lycanthropes. Eventually, the situation is that we will have to face and fight them but if that is the case, we are at a disadvantage.

Last night, we trapped the seven lycanthropes in a trick and annihilated them easily, but that was a victory by strategy.

If we fought in a forest full of obstacles against a larger party, I am not confident we would win.

'But there is no exam that cannot be cleared.'

It's my guess that the hint to clearing this exam is in this village.

I mean the village people that are living smack dab in the middle of the lycanthrope territory.

They neither have weapons or wariness, let alone any watchdogs!

'It makes no sense that there's no dogs.'

It's a truth I realized only a moment ago, that because lycanthropes can change into humans, that in order to distinguish them, watchdogs are needed. A village on hostile terms with lycanthropes should have watchdogs at its entrance.

But in this village, there isn't a single dog.

'I'll investigate a bit more.'

I summon Sylph and begin to explore the village and gather information.



At the village square, a dozen people approached the chief that had just returned from escorting the group to the empty house.

"Chief, what happened?"

"I put them in the house that Jason used to live in."

"Isn't this too dangerous, chief? They said they fought with those monsters."

"My goodness, they said they killed ten..."

The boys, here and there, their expressions, were stricken with fear.

"They are dangerous ones, indeed."

As they chatted, the chief became lost in thought.

The lycanthropes that controlled this area, the silver clan is a subject of terror to this village's citizens. To the point that they could not even have any thoughts of daring to resist.

So the appearance of travelers that fought and killed ten of that silver clan is plenty enough to send the village into shock.

"Maybe they're bluffing? Travelers that roam about often like to brag."

"Yeah, yeah. I think that too. I'm sure they just want to put on airs with us."

"I'm sure in reality they didn't even meet any lycanthropes or they barely escaped, one of the two."

The men badmouthed the visitors and were intent on belittling them.

But the chief shook his head.

"They do not appear to be bluffing. They were too sincere to be."

At the chief's words, the atmosphere settled again.

"What if they are strong travelers? Ajumma Barry said so. She said they didn't seem to be scared of lycanthropes at all."

"That's right. If they really are so strong they consider lycanthropes just some post-dinner exercise..."

"That is impossible."

The chief spoke firmly.

"It is probably true that they did kill ten lycanthropes. But they probably aren't that strong."

"You think so?"

"You never know."

At the men's rebuttals, the chief spoke again.

"You idiots. Recall that silver leader."

At those words, the men's expressions changed.

The silver leader.

The silver clan's lycanthrope leader himself is shock and terror. There is most likely no one entity stronger in this world.

"There is no person human that can look at that and not be scared. These travelers merely have not seen him yet."

"Then, then, what?"

"We carry on as always."

The chief's eyes turned cold.

"Put sleeping pills in the food to be served to them. They may catch onto something so split it into their lunch and dinner. And notify all this to the silver clan. The silver clan will probably know already."

"Yes."

"Understood, chief."

As he turned away, the chief mumbled.

"As always. That will do. We don't need any unexpected change."

As he returned to his home, the chief mumbled to himself.

"We have lived well up to this point..."

And from above, there was someone small, watching the scene down below.

-Meow.

The life in the form of a cat, made of wind, wagged its tail.



The chief proceeded on schedule.

He sent one man to the silver clan to relay the news, and he ordered the village women to serve food to the travelers. Of course, it's a meal with sleeping pills.

Periodically, he pretended to ask the travelers how they were holding up, as he watched their movements, and perhaps the sleeping pills worked or they had relaxed, because the travelers went to bed early.

'All according to plan.'

The chief laughed quietly to himself and went home.

The home of the chief who lived alone, without a family, is dreary.

The chief took out some wine from a cupboard and pours it into a cup, and drinks. It

is the time of day he likes the most. In this barren village, there is no equal to its luxury.

To age and grow old itself is a luxury here. Where living a day more is lucky, the chief is the oldest person in this village.

That is power.

The chief found pleasure every day in sweet power.

Suddenly he thought of the travelers that came to the village.

For sure, they passed various adventures to survive to this point.

These travelers were strong enough to win against lycanthropes, more incredible than an old chief from a small village.

‘Unfortunate.’

They are young people who have, for sure, lived more incredible lives than that lived by this old man, and their fates will not pass past this night.

He pitied their tragic fate, and at the fact that he could still feel pity, the chief oddly felt excitement and gratification. It is because he can conclude that he is better because in the end, he is alive.

“You are young and your prime with futures ahead, do not resent us so much.”

He mumbled so and took another sip of his wine.

But then.

“Don’t you mean if you do something worth resenting, you are ready to receive resentment?”

“Hu uk!”

From a voice heard behind his back, the chief felt like his heart would stop from alarm.

Ssengurang!

In his surprise he drops his cup which breaks and the wine wets the floor.

The chief turns and looked behind him.

And his two eyes grew wide.

Someone that should be out cold from sleeping pills right now is standing right in front of him.



It's obvious, but we didn't touch our food.

The village women, who brought us our food with sleeping pills in them and told us to enjoy our meal as they smiled, were frightening.

How used to this are they?

I wonder how many travelers they tricked that they are so comfortable with it.

As it grew dark, I used Sylph's skills to eliminate any noise and infiltrated the chief's house.

For a person that entrapped a visiting group, he showed no guilt and his free and easy going spirit is despicable.

"You... you... how did you...!"

"I came to thank you for the great meal."

"Oh, really? Haha, there's no need for that..."

"Give me a seat, why don't you. You don't have any more chairs?"

"Haha, sure. Actually, let me call someone to get you something to drink."

Call someone.

I can tell a lot of things from this trivial behavior in getting someone else for something so small. This is the chief, exercising his power as the strongest person in the village.

At most, where does this power come from, in an old man?

I now realize what that is.

“Shut up and sit.”

“...!”

At my words, the chief who had been trying to leave his house, freezes.

“If you don’t shut up and sit down, I’ll gouge your eyes out.”

I threaten him strongly, one more time. Well, that’s an expression I learned from Kang Chun-seong.

Luckily, the chief seems to think I am a person capable of doing so. Stricken with fear, he obligingly sits down in his seat.

I gaze around the house and bring a chair I see and sit across from him.

“In the dead of night there is no one watching guard, and as for scouts, you only have but two. A village like this surviving in the lycanthrope district is as plain as day.”

I continue speaking.

“You have a mutual agreement with the lycanthropes, or you’re ruled by the lycanthropes, one of the two. Am I wrong?”

“That, um...”

“If you don’t answer, I’m going to cut off your fingers one at a time.”

“Hik! Yes, that’s correct!”

“Then, in what way do you sustain your relationship with the lycanthropes? I thought about it through and through and came up with some hypothesis, listen.”

I continue talking.

“You said this village is made up of people escaping from a corrupt lord? I think that

part is true. Only then does this make sense. People who are escaping from the heavy taxes keep coming into this village, and every time, you guys feed them sleeping agents and serve them up to the lycanthropes as meals, and with that price, you retain your lives."

"You probably have people coercing others to come to this foreign village? If you don't do that and offer those people up, you'll become the meals. Am I wrong?"

"You're right."

The chief continues speaking with a shaky voice.

"We do not want to do these deeds either. If we were strong like you guys, I'm sure we would have fought these heinous lycanthropes! But we are not strong..."

The chief's eyes start to water. He continues talking, as if this is cathartic to him.

"How many village citizens became their meal! If I think about all the family and neighbors we have had to sacrifice to survive..."

I can't go on listening to it and speak.

"Sylph, cut off a finger"

-Meow!

Su kuk!

With the wind dagger, Sylph cuts off the chief's right thumb.

"Uhaaack!"

The chief sees his right hand with a missing finger and his eyes get bigger and he screams.

This despicable old man's screams didn't escape out of the house. It is because I used Sylph to eliminate the noise.

"Acccck!"

The chief kept on screaming out loud.

He seems to be trying to call in villagers with his screams. Up to his tricks amidst this, I chuckle.

“Shut up.”

Chul suk! (slap)

I lash out at his cheeks until he becomes blank. He looks like he can't believe he is being slapped by a guy young like me.

“What? You flustered?”

I grab the chief's chin and lift his face up and stare him in the eyes.

“You lived ruling this village like a king, never thought you'd be here like this?”

“That, uh...”

“A dirty old man like you, I think I get how you can live here, treating others like servants.”

“...”

“In this village over 200 people, of the people that are over 50 years old, there's only you.”

The chiefs two eyes get wide.

I've hit a nerve.

I make a cynical smile.

“You probably gave any old person up to the lycanthropes. And the person who decides who becomes a meal, is you. Having received that responsibility from the lycanthropes, you set yourself up as the leader.”

“It's, it's something someone must do. If not for me, this village...”

"Then shall we test your sacrifice, considering your sincerity for this village?"

I grab the chiefs collar and pull him close to me and speak.

"You called the lycanthropes to this village, didn't you? I'm going to use you, chief, and kill all of those bastards. But thinking about this village's safety, you cannot align yourselves with us and make enemies with the lycanthropes. But of course, if you don't cooperate, I will kill you. So, how's that? Want to show us your noble sacrifice?"

Chapter 42

The Ranch (Part 2)

I really was prepared to do all kinds of terrible things to the chief.

There's nothing to hold me back from a wicked man who serves up humans as food to monsters. He's a man a hundred times more wicked than Park Go-chan.

But that kind of conviction of mine was unnecessary.

"I, I will. Whatever it is, I will oblige. What do I need to do?"

At the chief's reply, I smile.

'I knew you would.'

The outsiders that came upon this village and when needed, even the same village people, he offered them up as food to lycanthropes.

Basically, he is the lycanthropes' agent.

There is no way a person like this has any altruism.

"When are the lycanthropes coming to this village?"

"They are coming tonight. They will probably be here shortly."

"How many?"

"Usually they come in pairs."

"Do they come to the village entrance?"

"Yes."

"Tell me everything you know about the lycanthropes."

At my words, the chief paused momentarily and then began his explanation.

"The lycanthropes that control this district have silver fur and they are known as the Silver Clan, and to my knowledge, their numbers are over a hundred now."

"A hundred?!"

I'm shocked.

According to the Korean Arena Research Center, at most, the lycanthrope group was a few tens.

But a hundred?

"They weren't so numerous to begin with. Just twenty years ago they barely numbered 20."

Following the information from the research center, lycanthropes live in family groups.

The father became the leader and lived with a group of his wives and children. According to the father's ability, he would be able to gather more wives and his offspring would increase.

The size of the group is determined by the amount of land they control.

It is because the number of offspring is determined by how much prey can be gathered from the hunting.

The group is formed from family units and they survive through hunting, so the scale of the group always stays consistent.

But the Silver Clan, these lycanthropes succeeded in increasing their group's numbers by a new survival method.

'An incredible revolution!'

I find the Silver Clan's leader to be great.

It can be compared to the way prehistoric humans exploded in population due to

farming.

The bastards moved from getting food from hunting to 'ranching!'

Ranching.

It's a despicable phrase.

By chance, as humans trickled into their territory, the Silver Clan's leader picked up a new opportunity.

Let the humans develop their village, and run this village like a ranch, periodically getting supplied with food.

As they safely gathered quantities of food, they quickly propagated and succeeded in growing a clan to a hundred members.

Growing the family group five times in twenty years signified that the Silver Clan's leader has big ambitions. To succeed in his ambitions, he is growing his clan's power.

'Damn it. The research center's opinion was wrong. We should've chosen to pass through the troll's territory!'

If this enemy lycanthrope group were normal, our group's abilities would have been more than adequate to defeat them.

But the enemy is a lycanthrope clan of one hundred that is led by a leader that is smart enough to innovate.

It would have been better to go through the troll territory.

No matter how strong trolls are, they don't behave in group actions so we could have evaded and passed through.

'In this case, if we don't' use this village, there is no way we will clear this mission!'

It may turn out that I have to make a cruel decision far worse than the things the drastic chief has done.

That night, I use the chief to tell the village people not to come out of their homes.

Then I go out with my teammates to the village street and stakeout the entrance. The plan is to take out the lycanthropes all at once when they reach the village.

-Meow!

A little while later, Sylph returns from scouting and draws a number 4.

It means 4 lycanthropes are headed our way.

I speak to Kang Chun-seong.

"When I give you the signal, go out first and get their attention so they look towards you momentarily. Because I'm going to use that moment to snipe them. And we have to leave one alive to return."

"Understood."

Finally, the lycanthropes appear. The bastards just confidently walk straight through the front entrance.

And now, this is the beginning.

"Okay, now go."

I tap the chief in the shoulder.

"Uh...!"

The chief is so stricken by fear that initially, he could not move forward.

I get close to the chief's ear and whisper.

"If you try anything, Sylph will slit your throat."

"I, I understand."

"Now go."

The chief looked like he was about to cry and gets pushed out by me.

The chief approached the lycanthropes that have come to the village. The chief that was stricken in fear, as if he never was, bowed his head and greeted them.

“Oh my, welcome. We have been eagerly awaiting your arrival.”

It's not a greeting, he's practically receiving them.

“Where are they?”

Asked one lycanthrope from amongst them. The chief pointed them towards our lodgings.

“Like always, we fed them sleeping agents and have put them to sleep. Those fellows, they suspected nothing and passed right out.”

“Lead us.”

“Yes, yes. Follow me.”

The chief took the lead and started to walk. It's some amazing acting. The secret to that acting is brazenness. Up to now, just like this, he has offered up his own, people, as food to these monsters, and the thought of all of this is simply contemptible.

“Now.”

At my word, Kang Chun-seong nodded his head, then runs out.

At the same time, I implement another intervention.

“Weapon.”

The Mosin-Nagant rifle appeared in my right hand. I hand over the rifle to Sylph.

“Huh?”

“What's this?”

The lycanthropes look at the suddenly racing Kang Chun-seong with suspicion. To them, it is strange to have a meal (human) come at them in this village that is the same as a pantry.

But they quickly become flustered.

Tang!

With a gunshot, one of their heads explodes.

“Huk!”

“No, no?!”

Without knowing the cause, a fellow lycanthrope that had come with them died instantly and it threw the lycanthropes into chaos.

“Uhik! Save, save...!”

With petrified screaming, the chief ran away.

Without losing that moment, Kang Chun-seong boldly ran in and did a midair spin kick.

Pat!

But maybe the move was too big of an attack. The lycanthropes promptly scatter.

Kang Chun-seong lands and immediately heads for the lycanthrope to his right.

“How dare a human!”

The angered lycanthrope slashed around his heinously long and sharp claws.

Kang Chun-seong whipped his left arm and eliminated the attack. At the same time, with his right hand, grabbed and pulled on his knee. At that critical juncture, the lycanthrope loses his balance and falls down.

Kang Chun-seong has attained the superior position and landed punches like rapid fire.

Pupupupupupuk-

Kang Chun-seong turned the lycanthrope into rice cakes with his amazingly fast paced

consecutive strikes.

In that time, Sylph has pulled the bolt and got rid of the empty cartridge and targeted again.

Tang-

“Kuhung!”

This time, a lycanthrope has been shot in the heart. Holding the hole in his chest and with a blank stare, his dead appearance makes an impression.

Now, there is only two remaining. No,

Oodoodook!

Kang Chun-seong's punch crushed a lycanthropes neck. Now there's only one left.

“How, how could this be! They tricked us!”

The one remaining lycanthrope glared with rage at the chief that is in the distance. The chief doesn't know what to do and shakes.

“Just you wait! We'll punish you all!”

The lycanthrope turned around and begin to run.

“It would be strange just to let him return unharmed. Sylph, shoot its left leg.”

-Meow.

At my words, Sylph pulled the trigger without hesitation.

Taang-

“Ggaeng!”

A sad noise can be heard and a limp running lycanthrope's silhouette soon disappeared into the darkness.

Well, 4 lycanthropes is an easy victory. Not to mention, it wasn't a success from a direct confrontation, but a one-sided ambush.

But the chief who contributed greatly to this success is about to burst into tears.

"But now, what is to come of our village..."

What.

You're all doomed by the lycanthropes.

The chief who contributed to the attack will no doubt wish for all the lycanthropes to die. That way, it won't be found out that he cooperated with us.

But I purposely left one alive to return. Now, soon, the Silver Clan will know that the chief sided with us and led them to a trap.

This village has become an enemy of the Silver Clan.

I approach the chief and speak.

"Now the bastards will take this incidence as a sign that this village has joined us to defy the Silver Clan."

"..."

"Now you and your people have no choice. You have to join forces with us and fight them."

"You say such impossible things...!"

"Did you not just clearly see with your own two eyes? How easily we eliminated them, I mean."

"Well, even so, the Silver Clan numbers over a hundred! Even with how strong you guys are, even if we all join forces to defy them, there is no chance for victory!"

"So? You're going to try now to lower your tail? Will you try to explain that it was all a misunderstanding, that you were threatened by us and had no choice?"

The chief is at a loss for words. I laugh coldly.

"Of course, if you plead like that, the village may continue to exist, but do you think you, the chief, will be able to keep your life?"

"...!"

"Even if you were threatened, you contributed in killing their kind, they probably won't let you live. I think they'll make an example of you and kill you quite grotesquely?"

"Then, then, what am I to do now?"

"Like I said. Fight with us. Shouldn't you have to desperately convince the village people to fight against the lycanthropes in order to save your own life?"

The village citizens, who have for a long time been under the rule of the lycanthropes, will not have the courage to pick up weapons and fight, not now.

But if the citizens say they will not fight, out of fear, the chief is a dead man. He has to pay for having cooperated with us.

In order for the chief to save just his one life, he has to instigate the village to fight.

"The Silver Clan leader is an incredible beast. R-really, are you confident you can win?"

"You saw the weapon I have, right? With that, no matter how strong the bastard is, he'll die in an instant."

I said confidently.

The chief, with his shaky body, nodded his head.

"I understand. I will convince the village people and have them fight."

"You made the right choice. Let's think of this positively. Isn't this a good opportunity to escape the pitiful lives of being the livestock supply?"

"..."

The chief had been made to carry a heavy burden and with his head hung low, he disappeared to somewhere.

“Hyung, you’re amazing! Was this your plan from the beginning?”

Joon-ho raced towards me, fanatic.

I nodded my head.

“The chief is a selfish man, it was easy to manipulate him.”

It’s probably because of that, that the lycanthropes made the chief their agent.

“If we fight with the village people, that should be enough for fighting the lycanthropes.”

Hye-su is happy too.

But I shook my head.

“That won’t work.”

“Huh?”

“Forgot? We only have a few days left. Our mission is not to eliminate the lycanthropes, it is to escape this forest.”

“Oh! Then what are you going to do?”

At that question, I replied in a cold tone.

“We pit this village and the lycanthropes in a fight, and we use that to run away.”

Chapter 43

Escape (Part 1)

“Now is finally the time to come out from under the lycanthropes’ rule!”

The chief had gathered all the village people and is delivering an impassioned speech.

“Raising us like livestock and using us as feed, how long will we live, bowing our heads!”

That shouldn’t be what he says, as the one who was the first to bow his head.

The village people are obviously flustered by their chief suddenly turned fighter.

“Um, chief, what is the reason you are suddenly saying these things?”

“It’s not like we live in submission because we like them. With what will we fight them?”

The men raise a good question.

The chief pointed towards us and spoke.

“It is because these people are here!”

Everyone’s attention turned towards us.

With an uncomfortable expression, Hye-su bent her neck down. Joon-ho looked like his conscience had been stabbed too.

After hearing my true plan, the two keep looking that way.

Gather the village people and make them fight the lycanthropes, we pretend to fight with them, and flee. It’s a cruel plan that uses the village citizens as a mere sacrifice to give ourselves more time.

I know it too.

That this is worse than what the chief has done all this time.

At least the chief had the excuse that what he did was for the survival of the village.

On the other hand, I have given them the hope of freedom and instead lead them into death. For the survival of the four of us.

'Regardless, the village people can't be much help.'

They are people that have, so far, just been helplessly controlled. Joining forces with these people won't give us a chance at winning against 100 lycanthropes. Also, the silver clan's leader is very smart and strong.

'In that case...!'

In that case, sacrificing these people so we can escape is better.

A village like this should disappear anyway.

...Is how I try to make sense of it.

So, what?

Where is there a person in this village who is without sin?

This village isn't full of weak people without guilt. They offered fellow humans up to monsters to live themselves. Being weak and good are not synonymous.

So even if we flip it and push these people to their deaths, its self-defense!

"These travelers have said that they will rid us of them! I have seen it. The four lycanthropes that came to our village were dealt with in the blink of an eye, a splendor difficult to believe!"

Whether he knows my intentions or not, the chief convinces the village with his strong tone.

Unbelievably, the villagers that said how are we to fight, gradually become convinced

by the chief.

They eventually had a hopeful look in their eyes as they looked at us. Their gaze, as if we are the deliverers of their liberation and freedom.

Amongst the citizens, one man suddenly asks us a question.

“Are you really going to fight for us?”

At that question, Hye-su and Joon-ho flinch.

I step up.

“Fighting for you all? That expression sounds a bit weird.”

“Huh?”

“You speak as if we will fight for free instead of you guys to get you your freedom. We are not fighting *for* you, we will fight together.”

At the mention of fighting, the citizens’ expressions grow dark again. They are fearful.

“If you do not all raise your weapons and fight the lycanthropes, we for sure do not have a reason to fight. If not, we will just leave. You all will probably suffer the retaliation of the dead lycanthropes. The bastards probably already believe that you have sided with us against them.”

“We aren’t the ones that killed the lycanthropes!”

“You guys killed them! This situation is all your fault!”

“That’s right, we’re without fault here!”

They try to pass on the blame and their behavior makes me scoff.

“Did you just say you are without fault? Is it not wrong that you put sleeping agents in our food? Even though the ones who tried to offer us up as wolf food are all gathered here? If I wanted I could retaliate for that and just kill you all right now and leave.”

Mixing in threats and speaking forcefully, the citizens flinch.

Stricken with fear, the only way to work with these people is through fear.

"Decide if you will fight or not. If you do not wish to fight, we will just depart now."

The citizens stare at each other.

"Of course we'll fight! These people say they will fight with us. We will not get another opportunity like this!"

Said the chief.

The women are overcome with anxiety, and the men approve one by one.

"I, I will fight."

"Now that this is the situation, there's no choice but to fight."

"Even if we continue living like this, I won't last long and become food anyway."

The chief rejoices and talks to me.

"Did you see? We are resolved to fight."

"Then prepare to fight. We don't have much time. Do you have weapons?"

"We have some bows we use for hunting and some axes we use for cutting wood. Any other weapons we had were confiscated..."

'Figures.'

There's no way they would let slaves keep weapons.

"Prepare as many bows and arrows as you can, and according to the number of people, sharpen some wood and make spears."

"Understood. Did everyone hear that?"

"Yes!"

The men get busy moving.

I make more requests to the chief.

"Take all the able bodied men into groups of four, and have them take turns scouting the fence. When the bastards appear, have the men shout out the alarm."

"Okay, got it. And what about you guys...?"

"First, we will patrol around this area and return. And dispose of these corpses."

I point to the three dead lycanthrope corpses.

"Okay."

The chief believes my words without any suspicion.

I gesture to my teammates.

"Let's go. Joon-ho and Kang Chun-seong, lift a corpse each."

"Okay, hyung."

"Will do."

Joon-ho, Kang Chun-seong, and I each take a corpse onto our shoulders. Hye-su follows, and together we head out the village.

"Hyung, why did we bring the corpses out with us?"

"First, we have to harvest the majeong."

"Ah..."

"We have another use for the corpses but first, let's get the majeong."

I have Sylph get the majeong from inside the corpses. Hye-su puts the three majeong into the item bag.

I look around our surroundings and cut down some vines.

I wrap the vines around the lycanthropes' necks and hang them from a tree. Three

lycanthrope corpses hanging from a tree.

This is an adequate set up for provoking the silver clan guys.

“Hyung, this...”

“Is a provocation. When they see this they will be enraged. How do you think they will react when they see the villagers holding weapons, prepared to fight?”

“...probably attack?”

“Yep, we have to eliminate the chance for dialogue. We have to make sure both sides fight.”

To the lycanthropes, this village was an important food supply source. If the lycanthropes kill all the villagers, it's a big loss for them too.

They will decide there is no point to dialogue. They will mount an attack quickly, and at that, the villagers will resist.

While they are fighting, we have to make our escape as and run as far as possible.

“Then it will be okay.”

There is nothing more important than clearing the test.

“Let's go now. We don't have much time.”

“Okay...”

Hye-su's reply is quite weak. I see her feeling guilty and it makes my heart uncomfortable.

But I am convinced I am right. This is the only way to clearing this exam.

We head west.



“So, you are the only one to survive and return?”

“Yes, father! That old chief tricked us!”

The brothers that were sent to the village have all died and only one has returned, limping his leg.

As the news that the village people have dared to rebel has gotten the silver clan furious.

“We must kill all of them!”

“How dare they kill our brothers! The humans have all gone crazy!”

“We have to kill them brutally!”

The lycanthropes growled as they condemned the humans. It seems their wild nature that enjoys slaughter has been awakened.

But the father remains cool-headed.

He stays deep in thought, then asks his surviving and returned son.

“And you survived?”

“Yes, thankfully, I was hit in the leg and able to escape.”

“What about the humans’ weapon?”

“Like Helgi said, with a loud ‘tang’ sound, something so fast that it could not be seen flew by quickly and burrowed into flesh. Together with the sound, my brothers died.”

“But you successfully survived?”

“I was lucky.”

The father looks at his son coldly. Then he breaks into a smile.

“I don’t think so?”

“Yes?”

“The way I see it, I think the bastards let you survive and return.”

“...?”

Ignoring his son who can’t understand the reason, the father gets up from his seat.

He speaks to all the lycanthropes that have gathered on the hill.

“Everyone prepare to fight. Before the day brightens, we will end this fight.”

The lycanthropes feel joy and excitement. The word fight always gets their bloods to go.!!

“Wooooo-!”

“Woo-!”

Deep in the night, the cry of the lycanthropes from atop the hill spreads drearily throughout the night sky.

The father gestures to Helgi.

Helgi promptly approaches.

“Yes, father.”

“Take everyone and attack the village.”

“Me? Then father...”

“I have something else I need to check.”

That is all he says as father just smiles.



The village men hold their cut spears and prepared to fight.

Everyone is grimly determined.

They are people that escaped from a murderous tax. But after fleeing from the lord's tyranny and hiding in the forest, a more fearful ruler was waiting for them.

The lycanthropes collected not money, nor grain, but human life.

Everyone lived, suffering under the pressure that their fates would be that one day, they would be wolf food. It was a life so pitiful that they might long for the tyranny of the lord.

Unable to stand it any longer, there were those that tried to escape this forest but eventually, their heads would appear the next day in the village.

Living wasn't living.

But even that living is over with today.

After deciding they would fight, the villagers who suffered in terror explode into a rage. Rather than return to how it was before, they decide whether they live or die, they will see an end.

Then.

Woooo-!!

Kuhoooo!

The howl of the lycanthropes resonates out everywhere. The village citizens are scared out of their wits.

“It's, it's them!”

“They're already here!”

“Everyone work together! We have to fight!”

The villagers have lived a long while having seen lycanthropes and know. That these howls now are full of extreme rage.

“But what happened to those people?”

Someone asks the question.

The men look at each other and wonder, then look to their chief.

“Those, those people, they said they were leaving to go scout...”

The chief's face is frozen in confusion.

Why have the people who said they are scouting not appeared even when the lycanthropes have drawn so close?

Chapter 44

Escape (Part 2)

It's a tight schedule.

I lead my teammates in as fast a pace as possible.

'We have no time.'

If I were the lycanthrope leader, I would extinguish the village rebellion as fast as possible. There is no need to give the villagers ample time to prepare for the fight.

What I can be sure of is that they will not attack the village hastily.

They will know that we are with the villagers.

Fearing the power of the rifle we have, they won't attack rashly and will behave carefully.

The longer the fight, the better.

The longer it gets, the more time we will have to escape.

'About now, will the village people will have realized we ran away?'

The chief, who is accustomed to petty tricks, will have probably have caught on by now.

But it's no use.

The dice has already been rolled, and even without us, they have no choice but to fight. If they were to surrender now, there is no guarantee that the lycanthropes would forgive them.

You get older, and you get eaten.

How can you live under that kind of fate? I have no confidence that I could live such a pitiful life without a future.

That's probably how they villagers feel now.

What they needed was something to explode that pent-up powder keg. Its exploded now, and they'll fight with reckless abandon.

The fact that hundreds will die due to me weighs heavily on my heart.

'My eyes were indeed not wrong. Didn't I say so? Examinee Kim Hyun-ho is a person plenty capable.'

The baby angel's words cross my mind.

'Every moment, your decisions and action were bold and cold. What average person could do as examinee Kim Hyun-ho did? Now do you realize that you are not an average person, but a very special human?'

"That damned..."

I carelessly spit out profanities.

"What is it?"

Asked a surprised Joon-ho. Hye-su and Kang Chun-seong are looking at me too.

"Do all of you think what I did was wrong?"

I ask.

"Was there another option besides sacrificing the villagers?"

The atmosphere becomes solemn.

"You were right."

The one who said that was Kang Chun-seong.

"The people in that village are not simply weak and kind. If you had not caught on to

the chief's plans, it is clear what fate we would have suffered."

"..."

"Those people tried to kill us so that they could live. As a human, instead of upholding morals, they prioritized their own survival, and we are merely making the same decision. If they had approached us with goodwill, we would not have made this decision."

"...You think so?"

"I do, so do not think anything of it."

Joon-ho and Hye-su both say a word.

"I think you were right too, hyung."

"I didn't think you were wrong either, oppa. It's just... I just found this situation where we had to make such a decision to be harsh."

"I understand. I didn't make that decision because I liked it. Okay, let's go."

I continued moving. My teammates followed.

Kang Chun-seong that said if they have approached us with goodwill, we would not have been able to make this decision.

...Would I really?

Had they been kind people, would I have been unable to use them?

I cannot be sure.

What kind of person I am, how these exams are changing me as a person, I cannot be sure.

More time will pass, more exams experienced, and in time it may come that I do not suffer this anguish. Emotion may erode down and I may thirst for it.

After becoming a person like that, will I still be able to laugh with my family?

'I don't know.'

Let's stop thinking thoughts like this.

First, I have to survive.

We walked absent-mindedly. We don't say a word to each other, and just walk.

Finally, an exhausted Hye-su speaks.

"Let's rest and continue."

"Oh, sorry. Now that I think of it, we didn't rest once. Are your feet okay?"

"Not much of a problem but the blisters have popped and it's a little uncomfortable. I'll treat it for a bit."

"Okay."

We rest for a short while.

Hye-su tooks off her shoes and socks. Her tiny foot has exploded blisters and is a mess.

Thankfully, we have a really good healing potion. 19th turn Yoo Ji-soo's team gifted us the healing potion.

Hye-su opens the healing potions stopper and pours a very small amount onto her foot and spreads it like an ointment. Then, surprisingly, the injury from the broken blister quickly closes.

Joon-ho and I look at it with wide open eyes.

"Wow, that result is really immediate."

"Seriously."

At that rate, I think even a large injury will get healed right away.

After treating all her wounds, Hye-su puts her socks and shoes back on.

I summon Sylph.

"Sylph, scout for us please."

-Meow.

Sylph quickly disappears somewhere.

But she returns much faster than usual and lets out a sharp cry.

-Meow!

We are surprised and stand up right away.

"Is it an enemy?"

Sylph nods her head and moves quickly and draws a number with her body.

The number is '1.'

"One enemy?"

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

"Is it a lycanthrope?"

I think maybe not so I ask, and this time too, Sylph nods her head.

Only one lycanthrope has followed us. What is it thinking? Has it forgotten that the number of lycanthropes that have died because of us is 13?

"And the distance?"

Sylph draws a number 272.

'Okay. One shot with the gun.'

"Weapon."

The Mosin-Nagant appears in my right hand. I take out the bullets I had stored in my pocket and load, and hand it to Sylph.

“Let’s finish this now.”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head and quickly gets into shooting position and then pulls the trigger.

Tang-

The shot rings long.

“Did you get it?”

Sylph shakes her head.

I’m suspicious.

Sylph shot the gun and didn’t get it in one shot? Sylph would not have made a mistake.

“Shoot until you get it.”

-Meow.

Then, Sylph shoots 4 consecutive shots.

As she is done with the loaded 5 bullets, with an awkward expression on her face, she looks at me.

I give her another clip with 5 bullets.

Sylph loads it quickly and begins to shoot again.

Tang, click, tang, click.

Sylph keeps shooting.

She’s shot this many times and she still hasn’t got it?

I think maybe, and ask.

"Is it holding something like a shield?"

Sylph nods her head.

'I knew it.'

Last time, one of them used its buddy's corpse as a shield and ran off. It seems this one has heard of the incident and is using a similar approach.

"Everyone, get ready. Something isn't right."

"Yes, hyung."

"Got it."

Joon-ho and Hye-su take out their respective weapons.

But then.

-Nyaaaaah!

Sylphs lets out a stinging scream. It sounds like she is warning us. When we are surprised by her sound, something flies in like a flash.

Swish- Kwajik!

"Kuhuk!"

With a terrifying sound of impact are cries of the throes of death. It's Joon-ho's voice.

"Kyaaak! Joon-ho!"

Hye-su screams out loud.

What on earth has happened. I turn around behind me.

'...?'

I am so shocked I cannot say anything.

An arrow is pierced in Joon-ho's chest. Very deeply into his heart.

Joon-ho's eyes are in a wide eyed state, without a gaze, dead.

He is just there, dead.

When just a moment ago, he, Joon-ho, he was alive.

"Sylph! Get rid of all the arrows that come at us!"

-Meow!

Answers Sylph.

But it is a measure that is too late. Joon-ho is already dead.

'It would have been good to know just a little sooner!'

I get angry at myself.

It is using a shield, and possesses intellect similar to a human's. If that's the case, I should have thought of it possibly using weapons.

I felt like blaming Sylph.

Why did she not alert us to this fact! Why did she only cry out an alarm and not block the arrow that flew in at Joon-ho!

It is the limits of a spirit who cannot talk and without a command, cannot do anything proactively.

Then, Joon-ho's shield and spear disappear. The owner has died and his items too, have ceased to exist.

-Meow.

Sylph quietly alerts me.

Swish-

Another arrow that comes flying.

This time, Sylph uses her wind dagger and shatters the arrow.

Pajik!

The arrow is sliced into many pieces and scatter on the ground. It was an arrow aimed for me.

“So you are the spirit summoner.”

From the front somewhere, a stately male voice can be heard.

It's a lycanthrope.

The bastard keeps talking.

“Ho, that item that the spirit is holding is that problematic weapon.”

“...”

“A form with a long shape and a hole... so the iron gets shot from that hole? Then I just have to avoid to where that hole is pointing.”

Its impressive observations and decision making.

“It appears you only have one of that weapon. But that makes this too easy?”

“...”

“Our silver clan too, but lycanthropes disregard humans too much. That's why we don't use very many man-made things. But if used well, the results are very good. Like right now.”

This bastard is remarkable.

I suspect it so I ask.

"Are you the lycanthropes' leader?"

He answers.

"I am."

Of course!

How diligent...

A flexible mind that knows how to use human items.

This is the leader that introduced 'ranching' and grew the silver clan's numbers by five times.

The conversation halts there.

The enemy is hiding somewhere and doesn't say anything more, and we can do nothing but prepare for the next attack.

Swish-

Another arrow flies in. And Sylph uses her wind dagger to eliminate the arrow.

The actions and behavior of the silver clan's leader who will not actively attack seems strange. As if time is on his side so he has no reason to hurry...

'Wait, time?'

Time!

I now catch on to what the silver clan's leader's plan is.

The bastard knows about the spirit summons. He knows very well that the time for keeping a spirit summoned is limited.

He is waiting for Sylph's summon time to end!

"Sylph, where is he?"

Sylph points to her one o'clock with her front paw.

"Distance?"

This time, with her tail, she draws a number 16 in the ground.

16 meters.

It is a close distance.

Then attacking the bastard right now and seeing to a victory is the best and wisest plan. As time gets dragged out, our team, with a limited spirit summons time, will be at the disadvantage.

But then, Sylph draws a number on the ground.

32.

Then she erases the numbers and fixes another number.

59.

I'm surprised and ask her.

"He's backing away?"

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head.

I feel a chill creep over me.;

The opponent has retreated far back enough so as to not be hit by the spirit's attacks.

The opponent accurately knows that spirit summons is timed and that the farther away from the spirit, it's power diminishes.

His plan is clear; that by sustaining a moderately far distance, he is planning on a dragged out battle.

If I try to save on the spirit summons time and send Sylph back, he might come closer again and shoot more arrows.

I have to frequently summon Sylph and save on the spirit summons time.

“The opponent is too smart.”

My heart is beating and thudding hard.

The fear creeps in.

With what and how will we fight a monster that is not only strong but also intelligent?

I cannot get a grasp of how to overcome this situation.

First, we have to move.

“Let’s go. We have to escape.”

“The bastard?”

Asked Kang Chun-seong.

“He wants to slowly get into a long battle. As time goes on, we are at a disadvantage. There is no other option but to escape out of this forest.”

“I understand.”

“Oppa... what about Joon-ho...”

Asks Hye-su, close to tears...

Seeing Joon-ho lying there dead with an arrow in his heart, I feel as if my heart is ripping. I feel like he may get up any second and call me ‘hyung’.

“...let’s go. We have to go.”

I take the lead and walk, and Hye-su follows, holding back tears.

Kang Chun-seong walks in the back and watching our rear.

Chapter 45

Escape (Part 3)

When you summon a spirit and the time runs out, the summon time recharges when the spirit is not summoned.

The recharge is one minute every five minutes.

Because of that, I would usually summon Sylph every five minutes and send her to scout for 1 minute.

There was the discomfort of having to summon her again every five minutes and then return her repeatedly, but I was able to sustain the summons time in case of a fight.

But now, the situation is very different.

I had no idea that the silver clan's leader would suddenly draw near and unbeknownst to us, shoot arrows.

We cannot go without Sylph for five minutes. So I've changed the summon time from the five minutes to 25 seconds.

I summon Sylph every 25 seconds and ask her.

"Where is he?"

And then Sylph will draw a number for how many meters away he is.

I return Sylph quickly before it reaches 5 seconds and call her again 25 seconds later and ask the same question.

The silver leader sometimes is further than 100 meters, and when checked at other times, as close as 60 meters, repeatedly drawing nearer and farther, making us nervous.

1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds, 4 seconds...

This situation where I have to constantly keep track of every second of time is making me lose my mind.

But I have go this far to spare the summons time if we are not to lose.

'At this rate, I'll become exhausted first.'

The position of having to track the 25 seconds while escaping is miserable.

But the bigger problem is our stamina.

'He is probably thinking tactically, to just spend half a day chasing us.'

Will we be able to run for half a day without rest?

It is possible.

But the story becomes different with chasers on our tails.

He repeatedly shortens and lengthens the distance between us, making us extremely anxious. He occasionally shakes us up by shooting arrows towards us. He enjoys the tension between himself and the escaping prey.

We are mentally exhausted.

I am having problems, but Hye-su is struggling even more. With her weaker physique and the mental shock of Joon-ho's death, she gets exhausted even faster.

"This won't do."

I have to end this fight, no matter what.

No matter how smart or strong this bastard is, if he gets shot in the head, he'll die regardless.

I make an order to Sylph.

"Sylph, take the gun and go to his back and shoot."

-Meow!

Her strength gets weaker as she gets farther from her summoner, me, but she should have enough power to pull the trigger.

Sylph takes the Mosin-Nagant and moves. A moment later,

Tang-Kkang!

The gunshot and the sound of metal rang at the same time.

It's a fail.

He blocked the shot with his shield.

Tang-tang-tang-

The gunshots continue to ring but the only noises to follow are the sound of them getting blocked on the shield. A moment later, Sylph has shot her five bullets and returns.

'How does he know from which direction the shot is coming from?'

It is impossible that he senses the bullet coming in at supersonic speed. It means he catches on before it is shot.

Does he have a way of sensing where a spirit is?

I don't know.

I am so mentally exhausted that my head isn't spinning right.

Even after that, I attempt to snipe him a couple more times but they all failed. All it did was use summon time.

Time passes into daybreak.

"Oppa..."

Hye-su calls to me with a tired voice. She hands over her item bag to me.

"Oppa, you take this."

“What?”

At my surprise, Hye-su weakly laughs as she speaks.

“Just in case, you know.”

In case...

Hye-su is probably thinking that of the three of us, she will be the first to die.

“Don’t think like that.”

“Take it, quick.”

“Hye-su...”

“My arm hurts.”

Eventually, I take the item bag from Hye-su.

“I’ll give it back to you after the exam.”

“Yep, when the exam is over.”

I get the item bag over from her and say ‘unequip.’ As I do so, the item bag disappears. It means the item bag is now in my possession.

Hye-su grows tired quickly.

In the suffocating anxiety, we don’t rest and keep walking and to her, it is too difficult. I feel like death myself, and she’s suffering even more.

This heart suffocating pressure...

My sense of duty to not let Hye-su die too, makes me more impatient.

I summon Sylph one more time.

“Sylph, attack him one more time. This time, from the right.”

-Meow!

Sylph takes the rifle and moves to the right.

Succeed this time!

But this time too, the shot is a failure.

Tang-kang!

The sound of the bullet hitting the shield rings hopelessly. The five shots consecutively get blocked by his shield.

But then after all that.

-Meeeow!

Sylph comes back in a hurry and gives a sharp alarm.

'No way?!"

It's the impossible.

An arrow comes flying in. The bastard has come close and started a counterattack.

Thankfully, the arrow is blocked by Sylphs knife wind. She has understood the command from before to block any incoming arrows.

The arrows keep flying in.

And every time, the knife wind obliterated them.

But the knife wind uses a lot of power. The more it is used, the summons time shrinks!

"Sylph, hurry, reload!"

I shout as I hand her a 5 bullet clip.

Sylph continues to take down the arrows with her knife wind while she loads the gun.

But as she does it, like a lie, the arrow attack stops.

Sylph draws a number 43 in the ground with her tail. 58, 75... the bastard is backing away.

'Damn it.'

No one is injured but we've taken on a lot of damage. Just now, blocking the barrage of arrows, all we have done is use up a shit ton of Sylph's summons time.

The silver clan's leader is extremely intelligent. It's almost frightening how smart he is.

"He's caught on to the fact we have to reload after every five bullets. That's why after blocking the five bullets, he brazenly counterattacks."

At my words, Kang Chun-seong sounds a subdued groan.

For a lycanthrope that has no experience with a gun, having found that out is an impressive feat.

"No one is hurt?"

At my question, Kang Chun-seong nods his head.

But Hye-su is in a poor state. She isn't injured anywhere but she's gripping her sword tightly with both hands and shaking.

"I can't take it anymore... hu hu huk!"

Hye-su drops her sword and explodes into tears. She is in a complete panic from the terror and exhaustion.

"Hye-su. I know it's hard but you have to pull through."

Hye-su sits on the floor, crying.

"I'm sorry, oppa. I don't think I can make it. It's too hard to keep walking."

"Let's get a little farther, Hye-su."

“Just leave me and go please. I can’t. I’m exhausted!”

“Stop saying shit like that!”

I yell in anger.

“I’m sorry, oppa...”

She explodes into tears again.

Kang Chun-seong was staring at us and speaks.

“Let’s rest and continue. I am too tired.”

“...alright. That sounds fine.”

We all fall to the ground where we are standing and take a rest.

But we didn’t rest even for a minute. It’s because we heard the bastard speak.

“You are tired now?”

“...?!”

His voice is heard from a relatively close distance.

We’re startled and get up.

“I am sure the spirits powers are pretty much done as well?”

“Why don’t you test it?”

It was an accurate point but in order to hide it, I don’t back down and talk back to him.

But the bastard’s chuckling can be heard all around us.

“You cannot trick me. I gathered as much from your tenacious attempts to see an end to the fight.”

“So test us.”

“Haha, you are a fun human. Of all the humans I’ve seen, you are the most intelligent and you are mentally strong.”

“...”

“You threw all those villagers out as bait and attempted to flee, it’s impressive. I thought maybe, and pursued. You will be the first fun hunt I’ve had in a while.”

Hunt...

To him, all this is but a mere hunt.

I grind my teeth.

“Every now and then there is a human that runs away from the village. And every time, I go on a hunt like this. I invest the time, going slow. I shoot my arrows to instill fear, tormenting. Until the human succumbs and falls to fear and stress.”

Then he laughs.

“Can you picture it? When I revealed myself, he was actually relieved. His expression, it begged me to kill him quickly, to get it over with. Seeing that moment when terror surpasses the desire to survive and live, I see that and feel a sense of accomplishment.”

He is so wicked.

He is intelligent and malicious. He has enjoyed toying and gaming with the minds of humans.

Because he is this kind of being, it is probably how he came to raise humans as livestock like ranches.

“It is okay to be prideful. I have enjoyed this game so far, and of all the games, no humans have lasted this long. I kind of want to enjoy it longer, but I will end it for you. I will see to it that we finish.”

I take the gun over from Sylph.

From a close distance, the knife wind is better than the gun.

The bush in front us moves and one being reveals himself.

Revealing himself to us for the first time, he is in his human form.

He is a handsome man with tall height and shining silver hair. This must be his human transformation form.

In one hand, a shield, and in the other, he is holding a bow.

“Introductions first, I am the silver clan’s leader, Leon Silver.”

Leon Silver’s appearance starts to change.

Fur starts to grow all over his body and his build gets bigger. His nails get longer. And he becomes neither a human or beast, covered in silver fur.

He is a lycanthrope larger than any other.

I am overwhelmed for a while and come to my senses and shout to Sylph.

“Attack!”

-Meow!

Sylph shoots out her knife winds.

At the same time, Leon Silver moves too.

Chwak, Chwak-

The bastard moves left and right like a flash of lightning and avoids the knife winds.

Kang Chun-seong heads in with a kick, but Leon lays flat to avoid it.

Then he crawls on all fours and approaches me, fast.

I use the Mosin-Nagant and load and aim and pull the trigger.

Tang-pak!

A tree is hit by the bullet.

Then he just comes in with his claws.

“Kuk!”

In my surprise I collapse onto my back. By the skin of my teeth, his claws barely brush over the top of my head.

-Meow!

Sylph shouts as she sends out her knife winds.

Like a ghost, he leaps and escapes them all.

He delicately lands and this time, Leon Silver goes for Hye-su.

“Hye-su!”

I quickly pull the trigger but my inaccurate aim cannot hit the quickly moving bastard.

Hye-su is clenching her jaw and gripping her sword tight. Leon Silver, as if the whole thing is absurd, flippantly smiles.

“I’ll make it comfortable, miss.”

“Ahhhh!”

Hye-su screams and swishes her sword. It’s a pitiful resistance.

Pook!

That second, it was like the world stopped.

In that frozen time, I looked on, blankly, at the scene before my eyes.

It was a dream.

It is a despicable nightmare, four long claws piercing through Hye-su’s body to the other side.

“Ku huk!”

Hye-su lets out a moan and lifelessly collapses. Her body falls effortlessly to the ground, and in Hye-su’s last moment, she is looking at me. She is looking at me with tears in her sad, sad eyes.

I’m sorry, oppa.

I’m going first.

At last, Hye-su can rest in peace.

“Hye... Hye-su!”

I scream, close to tears.

Leon Silver stares at me in my state. His eyes are laughing. As if he was wanting to see the look of despair on my face.

“Ugh AHH!”

I am my gun at him and pull the trigger.

Tang!

As the gunshot rings, the bastard easily steps to the side. He is moving out of the way by seeing where the barrel of the gun is pointed.

I pull the bolt and get rid of the shell and shoot again.

It doesn’t shoot. I’ve used all five bullets.

“Eek! Shang!”

I take the bullets out of my pocket and reload. My hand’s won’t listen to me. They shake and cannot properly grab the bullets and put them into the chamber.

The bastard is looking at me try, and laughs.

Chapter 46

Return (Part 1)

In a completely empty world, there is nothing but white.

I have come back to this wearisome world full of white.

“You have come, examinee Kim Hyun-ho.”

The baby angel greets me after I come through the exam door.

And maybe he does respect other peoples’ feelings because this time he doesn’t obnoxiously blow his horn.

I sit down where I was standing.

By coming through the exam door my physical body was completely healed, but not my exhausted mind.

With a forlorn tone of voice, the baby angel speaks.

“You have come alone.”

“...”

I have.

I am alone. There is only person that has returned to this place.

Only I have returned from that hell.

Joon-ho and Hye-su are dead.

I haven’t yet seen Kang Chun-seong’s death, but seeing as how he did not return, I am positive he has died.

That day, when I lost reason after Hye-su died, the one who rescued me was Kang Chun-seong.

'Go on ahead. I'll take this.'

At those words I had come back to reality.

But how could I escape alone?

I hesitated.

We have to fight together.

But I was no longer any help. The summons time was over and Sylph had gone away.

Kang Chun-seong had already taken his attention away from me. His two eyes were focused only on the strong Leon Silver.

Leon Silver too looked like he had found a new enjoyment in Kang Chun-seong's glare.

"Go. I will see an end to this with this guy and follow after. No matter how long it takes, I will return."

Like that, I left Kang Chun-seong and ran away.

Regardless of day or night, I ran like mad. Thankfully, my physical strength buff entry level 4 was able to handle it.

The forest ended and when I arrived at a tall and steep mountain, the exam door appeared before me and I stared at it and collapsed onto the floor and sobbed.

Joon-ho, murdered in vain.

Hye-su, looking at me with her sad eyes in her moment of death.

Kang Chun-seong, sending me away and continuing the fight alone.

Now, at the feeling of loneliness in knowing that I am alone, I felt like going crazy. As the team leader, not only did I sacrifice the village people, but I survived by sacrificing all my team members too.

“You look sad.”

At the baby angel’s words, I come back from my flashback.

“But you did clear the exam so congratulations. Congratulations, examinee Kim Hyun-ho. You have gained the highest grade this time as well.”

“...”

“Man, you have no energy, this is no fun.”

The baby angel tried to delicately tease me, but I don’t have the energy to reply.

The baby angel stared at me, then suddenly says.

“Then an energy booster quiz!”

“...”

“When you used Sylph to shoot, how did Leon Silver know which direction the gun was shooting without seeing it?”

At those words my eyes open wide.

Yes, I found that strange too.

How did he know, with what and where, the gun was coming from?

He would not have known Sylph’s movements.

Then...

I think deep. And then one answer comes to mind.

“...smell.”

“Correct!”

“God damn it!”

It was smell.

Sylph, of course, has no sound or smell, but not the Mosin-Nagant. We had shot many times, so it must have been the smell of the gunpowder.

'I was foolish.'

If only I had gotten that.

Using Sylph's power, if I had eliminated the smell and then shot, we might have had a different result.

Because of Joon-ho's death and the bastard's pressure mind games, I had not thought about it clearly.

If only I had done a little better! Then Hye-su wouldn't have had to die!

"I know, huh."

The baby angel retorted after hearing my thoughts.

"If examinee Kim Hyun-ho had done a little better, examinee Lee Hye-su probably wouldn't have died."

"You shit!"

"Hehehe."

I'm furious and glared at him but the baby angel went around in circles and laughed.

"Have you learned a little lesson now?"

"What lesson? That if you're stupid, you die?"

"What do you mean stupid. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho did very well in this exam too. But still."

The baby angel flapped his wings, flew towards me, and shoved his face into mine.

"But you need to do better than that."

“...”

“In tense situations, even when close to death, examinee Kim Hyun-ho must be cool-headed and wise. Do you understand? Because I am rooting for you to make it to the end.”

“...”

“Now, now. You should hurry up and go. See you again in the next exam.”

As the baby angel flicks his finger, the exam door appears.

I opened the door and stepped towards the bright light.

And the third exam is over.



The research center is in a panic.

Including Cha Ji-hye, everyone is moving busily.

Lee Joon-ho, Lee Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong, are being pulled from their rooms.

The three of them have died of a heart attack. That is the last step of the those who died in the Arena. But in real life, their bodies are at least whole, which offers a little comfort. At least, here, they look peaceful.

“Are you okay?”

Cha Ji-hye comes to me and asks.

I weakly reply.

“Do I look okay?”

“I’m sorry. It was a useless question.”

“What will happen to Joon-ho and Hye-su now?”

"We are taking them to the hospital. They will be ruled as sudden deaths and we will notify their families."

"I guess that's what will happen to me too."

"If you lose your life in the Arena, yes."

I can picture it easily.

A scene with my family grabbing my corpse and wailing. To the family, it's a shock out of the blue.

"Today, return to your family and rest. We can hear your 3rd turn report later when you are mentally recuperated and stable."

"Okay."

Cha Ji-hye says a quick farewell and perhaps she is in a rush, because she disappears off to somewhere.

And then, the Yoo Ji-soo team finishes their exam and comes out.

Yoo Ji-soo, Cha Jin-hyuk, Lee Jin-yong.

19th turn, no, now the 20th turn team, all three have safely returned. I envy them.

"Wow! Long time no see! I totally forgot about you! What was your name?"

The dyed-blonde Yoo Ji-soo makes a fuss when she sees me.

'It's been so long you forgot my name?'

I find her behavior to be strange.

The kind-hearted Lee Ji-yong explains my confusion away.

"You guys are 3rd turn so at the longest, your exam would have been, 2 weeks? We had to clear a 3-month long mission."

"Oh..."

I spent ten days in Arena. They spent 3 months. And yet to all wake up the same day, it feels odd. That we have returned to the same time but lived a different amount of it.

“Your other members?”

Asks Cha Jin-hyuk.

“...you called it the 2nd and 3rd turn jinx?”

That answer was sufficient.

Yoo Ji-soo and Lee Ji-yong’s faces freeze.

“Damn...”

Cha Jin-hyuk scratches his head.

“Everyone died but you? A team like yours? Impossible! What kind of shit exam was it? That fellow Kang Chun-seong, his skills were incredible!”

Said Yoo Ji-soo, unable to believe it.

“It’s all my fault.”

“Shit, now what. So no you have to clear the exams by yourself?”

“I suppose so.”

Then Lee Ji-yong came to me and patted me on the shoulder.

“Don’t give up because you’re alone. There is a way to get the help of other examinees in nearby areas.”

“Other examinees?”

“Yea, other examinees in nearby area sometimes rescue teams in difficult situations like you. The research center will probably see if there’s a team for your rescue nearby.”

“Or sometimes they just give up on the teams with no prospects too.”

Said Cha Jin-hyuk.

"Hey!"

Scolds Lee Ji-yong.

Cha Jin-hyuk paid no heed and continued.

"Don't trust the research center too much. These people aren't a volunteer organization. Even though it seems like they are giving their whole-hearted help for the examinees, they aren't nice enough to invest labor and resources into a team with no prospects. Even more so for a team like you with all your members dead and a lone 3rd turn rookie."

"Hey! Stop saying your useless shit!"

Yoo Ji-soo yells angrily at Cha Jin-hyuk.

"I'm just letting him know. He shouldn't get stabbed in the back a step too late, he should prepare himself."

Cha Jin-hyuk keeps talking to me.

"Listen carefully, your manager Cha Ji-hye is a sincere woman, but the people above her aren't like that. She's in a position where she has to periodically send in her performance reports to the politically powerful above her, so they won't do anything that will put themselves at a loss. They'll probably destroy your contract and discard you."

"..."

"Prepare your heart for it, and no matter what, try your hardest to survive. Before you go home today, ask Cha Ji-hye to give you all the information she has on the Arena. Cause if you get dropped, there's no way for you to have access to that information."

Cha Jin-hyuk's advice is cold but a big help to me.

After hearing it all, it makes sense.

There doesn't seem to be a good chance for the research center to pour in lots of

money, time, and effort into a team, into me, with a high chance of dying.

On top of that, it's not a long term contract but a 1-year contract, so that's that much easier to get rid of.

I bow deeply to Cha Jin-hyuk.

"Thank you for your advice."

"You're welcome. Go on now."

"Hold on, wait!"

Yoo Ji-soo grabs me.

She hands me her phone.

"Your number?"

"Excuse me?"

"It's good to keep in contact with fellow examinees, you know."

"Oh, yeah."

I obediently input my number into Yoo Ji-soo's phone.

She pats me on the shoulder.

"Hang in there. There's nothing else I can say but that."

"Thank you."

With Cha Jin-hyuk's advice, I immediately go to find Cha Ji-hye.

But Cha Ji-hye doesn't seem like crafty woman, so I tell her truthfully.

"Tell me honestly. What are the chances that the research center will continue to support me?"

“...”

Cha Ji-hye's expression grows dark. Indeed, Cha Jin-hyuk was right.

“Please give me all the information you can on the Arena. If it so happens that I no longer receive the help of the research center, I have to keep clearing the exams and live.”

“...I cannot definitively say what decision the upper authority will make regarding you. Even though you have a very special main skill, you are now your 3rd turn and have lost all your team members and they'll see that very negatively.”

“I understand.”

She sighed.

“I will give you all the information I can offer. Even so, I don't have the high-ranking information, but it will be better than nothing.”

Cha Ji-hye took out her notebook and started it and moved some files over to a USB and handed it to me.

“For now, take this. Regardless of what the research center decides, I will continue contact with you and do my best to help you.”

“Thank you.”

“No. As your research center manager, it was my insufficiency that produced this result. I can only say sorry.”

At times she is impudent but I can tell Cha Ji-hye is a sincere person.

I say goodbye and get on the helicopter and then the car and arrive back in Cheonan.

The time passed in the real world time has only been a day, but I feel as if I haven't been home in years.

Chapter 47

Special Skill (Part 1)

I come home and everyone is out.

This is actually better. I needed the time to quietly calm myself down.

I take out this and that for side dishes and eat when suddenly my phone rings. I've gotten a text from someone I don't know.

[Among the assist skills, there is a special skill, get that first. From the pretty Ji-soo noona *<3*]

(TN: It's a heart emoticon if you didn't know.)

It's Yoo Ji-soo. Contacting me to give my advice, I am thankful. I'm not sure about the pretty part though.

'Now that I think about it, I haven't checked to see how much karma I got.'

I summon my board.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 7

-Karma: +1300

-Mission: rest until the next exam.

-Time limit: 19 days 16 hours

-You may receive your karma prize. To receive the prize, summon your board and say 'karma prize.'

I'm completely surprised. I've jumped two classes and earned an incredible 1300

karma.

I earned 900 karma on the 2nd turn, and even then that was the highest grade for that turn.

But this time, it's 400 more than that.

'Then again, I did play a big role.'

I eliminated 12 lycanthropes and personally threatened the village leader to win over the villagers. The one who led the results was definitely me.

'I basically killed all my teammates... '

I laugh bitterly.

What a superb score for a team leader that obliterated his whole team.

Anyway, I decided to retrieve my karma prize.

'She said to get the special skill.'

Since it is the advice of a 19th, no, 20th, turn veteran examinee, Yoo Ji-soo, I think that she has a point.

But for now, I decided to first get the opinion of Cha Ji-hye.

I don't know how my future with the Korean Arena research center will be going forward, but as of now I am still contracted. By contract, Cha Ji-hye is my manager and I cannot just use my karma without consulting her beforehand.

I send a text to Cha Ji-hye.

[Me: I am intending to choose my karma prize. I heard that I should first get the special skill, is this true?]

Ring.

A reply comes quickly. She is indeed diligent.

[Cha Ji-hye: How much karma did you receive?]

[Me: 1100]

I lower it a little. I don't think I should reveal it all since I don't know how my relationship with them will be going forward.

[Cha Ji-hye: You really received a lot. Then getting the special skill first is correct. Please get your special skill first and then contact me again.]

[Me: Okay.]

I speak to my board.

“Karma prize.”

-Please select a prize.

1. Skill: gain a capability.
2. Item: gain a weapon, shield, or other item.
3. Other: turn an object from the world into an item. Something that has been turned into an item can be carried into the exam.

-Remaining karma: 1300

“Skill.”

-Please select a skill.

1. Main skill: a basic capability needed for performing the exam. As the most important skill in determining an examinee's competence, only one selection is possible.
2. Assist skill: a skill that aids the examinee in addition to the main skill, according to conditions, can be selected.

-Remaining karma: 1300

"Assist skill."

Then a whole list of assist skills I can learn appears.

There are all kinds of assist skills, and I keep flipping through them when I discover the special skill.

25. ??? (Special skill): The special skill is determined by the examinee's constitution and propensity. Only one special skill may be selected. It is unknown what skill will manifest and it cannot be cancelled or changed. (-300)

I don't know what the skill will be.

So, I can get a good skill or I can get a completely useless one.

I hesitate a moment but Yoo Ji-soo and Cha Ji-hye both said to get this first, so I decide to follow their advice.

"Select special skill."

Pat!

A light shone from the board and seeps into me.

Then, some words appear on the board.

-You have acquired the 'skill synthesis' special skill.

-Skill synthesis (special skill): A 'skill' and 'skill' or 'skill' and 'item' that you possess can be joined to create a new skill. Retrieve the board and say 'skill select.'

*An item that is used for the synthesis will be consumed.

*A skill that is created through the skill synthesis cannot be used for synthesis.

-Remaining karma: 1000

'Skill synthesis?'

I think it's a skill where I can put together skills I already have to make a new skill.

'So in other words, it means I can gain a new skill without using karma?'

Acquiring a new assist skill costs at least 100 karma. But a skill made through the skill synthesis is free.

This is actually a great benefit!

'What a great skill! So this is why they said to get this first.'

Seeing is believing.

I decide to try out this skill synthesis.

I speak to the board.

"Skill synthesis."

And the words on the board change.

-Select the skill or item for synthesis.

1. Possible skills for synthesis: spirit summons (Sylph), physical buffer, direction GPS
2. Possible items for synthesis: Mosin-Nagant, item bag

Using an item for synthesis gets rid of it so I must not use those. I should synthesize skill and skill.

There's no need to think this one through. I'll synthesize them together in order.

"Synthesize spirit summons and physical buffer"

-Spirit summons (Sylph) and physical buffer are being synthesized.

Pat!

A white light twinkles from the board and then it gets sucked into my body. It's a sight similar to when I acquire a skill with a karma prize.

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired the divine protection of wind (synthesis skill).

-Divine protection of wind (synthesis skill): stir up wind with your body. It is influenced by the user's concentration and skill level along with the spirit's skill level.

*Entry level 1: time duration 15 minutes. Cool time 1 hour.

'Whoa...'

I can't stifle my surprise.

I can't believe I got such a great skill for free. I can gather what an impressive special skill I just got.

'Let's keep synthesizing.'

"Synthesize spirit summons and direction GPS."

-Spirit summons (Sylph) and direction GPS have been synthesized.

-Synthesis failed.

'A fail...'

I guess not everything can get synthesized together.

I continue and try to synthesize the physical buffer with direction GPS.

Pat!

This time, a success.

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired athleticism (synthesis skill).

-Athleticism (synthesis skill): improved reflexes and movement.

*Entry level 1

As it states, reflexes. Turning physical condition and direction into reflexes, this is fun.

Does it tell me where and how to move my body?

I've been told I am clumsy since I was young so this is a particularly good skill for me. In addition, this skill isn't used but is a skill that is permanent and continuous like the physical strength buff.

'With the wind protection and reflexes, I should be okay fighting in close range now.'

I am a physical buffer entry level 4. It's a strong body like that of a marine.

But I am that much of a klutz that even with this good of a body I got one-sidedly beat the shit out of by Cha Ji-hye in sparring. Even though there is the point of her being trained.

But this new athleticism covers that weakness of mine.

I can use the divine protection of the wind so while Sylph does the long distance shooting with the gun, I can fight in close combat.

I am deep in thought like so when I get a phone call from Cha Ji-hye.

'Oh right. Didn't she say to call after getting the special skill?'

I pick up the phone.

"Hello?"

-How is the special skill?

After a quick pause, I decide to lie.

"I received a skill called the divine protection of spirit. I think the skill, it's like getting strength from the spirit.

-Really? That's neither here nor there. It would have been good to get something better.

Cha Ji-hye is disappointed.

"I thought this much would be good, is there a special skill that's better?"

-Special skills are all special to each examinee so there is no repetition of skills. Another examinee I know had a most special skill, and it was a revival.

“Re, revival?”

-It was a skill for reviving at the cost of 300 karma. That's why I am disappointed. I wanted you to gain a special skill just as powerful to overcome your obstacles.

“...well. It is what it is. Isn't this pretty good, though? When Sylph's summons time is up, I can still call the wind to help.”

-I did not say that was bad. Then we should think about spending your karma prize around your special skill. You have 800 karma left, correct?

“Yes.”

-Then first, we should invest in your main skill, your spirit.

“The spirit? Didn't you say there's not much point in increasing the main skill level in the beginning?”

-We are not raising the level.

Cha Ji-hye cuts in.

-I have heard that you can work with two spirits, Sylph and Kasa, Is that correct?

“Oh, yeah.”

-Acquire the fire spirit, Kasa. Then in an emergency you can call summon both spirits, Sylph and Kasa, into the fight, and the option for your spirit divine protection special skill will increase as well. How about it?

Sounds like a good idea.

If I get Kasa and use it as an ingredient for the skill synthesis, would I get the divine protection of fire like I did for wind?

“That sounds like a good idea. I'll do that.”

-And we have to use your remaining 400 karma to reinforce your close combat ability. Hmm, for now, increase your physical buffer to entry level 5 with 300 karma, and the remaining 100 karma to gain another assist skill would be good.

“Which assist skill?”

-The combat and acceleration are good. Whatever it is, we have to use it to train you in a martial arts and overcome your clumsiness.

“...well, then, yeah, let’s do that.”

This woman too thinks I am clumsy. Meh, it’s an accurate observation.

Even though I don’t need those because I acquired the athleticism skill.

-And I am still in discussions with upper management at the research center regarding your situation. I am doing my best so please do not despair too much and wait.

“Yes, thank you.”

-No need. Well then...

“Yes.”

I end the call and as she said, I raised my physical buffer to entry level 5. I used 300 karma to increase my level and my body gets even harder.

All around my body the detailed muscles grow harder and seeing it, I can’t help but be awed.

Would it be believable if I stood on my finger?

My physique is incredible enough to do those cartoonish acts.

It really is true that entry level 5 is the limit for the human body.

I continued and spoke to the board.

“Show me main skills.”

-Examinee Kim Hyun-ho currently has spirit summons entry level 1.

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon the lower level wind spirit. You may summon by saying 'Sylph.'

*Entry level 1: summons time 2 hours. Time counts down when Sylph's power is used.

*Entry level 2: summons time 2 hours and 15 minutes. (-500)

Raising the level to entry level 2 costs 500 karma and even at that, the summons time only increases by 15 minutes. It's too inefficient.

Like Cha Ji-hye said, raising the main skill level in the beginning is a waste of karma.

It is definitely better to get the fire spirit, Kasa, than it is to increase a level.

"I will make a contract with Kasa."

Chapter 48

Special Skill (Part 2)

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon a spirit and use the power of mother nature.

*Possible summons spirits: Sylph, Kasa

*Entry level 1: summons time 2 hours

Reading the description on the board, I can see that I have made the contract with Kasa. I decide to summon it.

“Kasa.”

Hwaluluk-

A flame suddenly bobs up and down in front my eyes and the flame balls up and appears into one shape. The completed appearance is...

-Hek hek hek....!

A small animal pants with its tongue out. And a tail ferociously wagged left and right.

It's a puppy.

Appearing from the body that was ablaze, a puppy that looks like a Yorkshire terrier looks at me and greets me with its wagging tail.

“Ha...”

I sigh.

A dog after a cat. I was hoping it would be a spirit I could talk with.

-Bark bark!

The dog looks at me and barks. With shiny wide eyes he looks at me and I laugh.

"Alright, alright, come here."

-Bark!

Kasa jumps into my lap.

'Hold up.'

The summons time is still 2 hours.

If I have Kasa summoned with Sylph, does the time run out twice as fast?

I should test this out.

"Sylph!"

-Meow!

This time, a slender kitty appears and delicately sits on top of my head.

-Meow?

-Ruff?

Sylph and Kasa look at each other suspiciously. They exchanged looks like who are you...

Sylph taps Kasa on the head with her front paw.

Kasa is momentarily alarmed and growls and bares his teeth. Sylph too lowers her body and assumed a fighting position.

-Bark, bark, bark!

-Meow!

Kasa jumped up from my lap and gets entangled with Sylph. I see the two spirits tossing and turning above my head and sigh once more.

What a mess.

At least them quarreling doesn't use more summons time.

While the cat and dog argue, I look at my board.

*Entry level 1: summons time 2 hours. (1 hour 58 minutes 23 seconds)

As expected, the summons time goes by twice as fast.

Summoning both spirits is a waste. They don't look to be on good terms anyway, so unless it is an emergency situation, I should only summon one.

Since Sylph always does the scouting and sniping, I'll use her more.

"Kasa, return."

-Gung (whimper).

In the midst of fighting, Kasa makes a sorrowful sound. I scratch his head and persuade him.

"I'll summon you again and next time we can play."

-Bark!

As if in understanding, he barks one more time and disappears.

"Sylph, please gather all the dust in the house and put it in the trash."

Sylph turns into one stream of wind and flies by every nook and cranny.

One disgusting clump of half dust and half hair gets thrown in the trash. A house with three women, there is no end to the hair.

I return Sylph too and keep staring at my board.

I still have something left to do.

"Skill synthesis."

The words on the board change.

-Please select the skill or item you wish to synthesize.

1. Possible skills for synthesis: spirit summons (Sylph), spirit summons (Kasa), physical buffer, direction GPS
2. Possible items for synthesis: Mosin-Nagant, item bag

*An item that is used for synthesis is consumed.

A skill option for possible synthesis has increased by one.

“Synthesize spirit summons Kasa with physical buffer.”

-Spirit summons (Kasa) and physical buffer are being synthesized.

Pat!

And a light twinkled from the board.

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired the divine protection of flame (synthesis skill).

-Divine protection of flame (synthesis skill): stir up flame with your body. It is influenced by the user's concentration and skill level plus the spirit's skill level.

*Entry level 1: time duration 15 minutes. Cooldown time 1 hour.

A success. In addition to wind, I have gotten the skill for flame. For free.

‘It’s a big dangerous inside the house so I’ll test it out later at the mountain.’

I decide to test out the divine protection of wind and divine protection of flame on Taejo mountain at dawn.

Now, I have 300 karma left. How to use it?

Cha Ji-hye recommended getting a martial arts related assist skill and learning to fight.

But because I have the athleticism from the synthesis skill, I think that will be sufficient.

Martial arts is, in the end, moving the body with precision, so there shouldn't be a need to acquire an additional martial arts skill in addition to the athleticism, right?

After thinking it through carefully, I postpone my decision.

'I'll think it through a bit more before deciding.'

I still have 20 days before the next exam. For today, I'll test out the new skills one by one and think some more.



The time is just past 5 pm and Hyun-ji is getting in from school.

But she's not alone.

"Oppa!"

A girl with long straight hair and double eyelids waves a cheerful hand and runs at me. It's Yoo Min-jeong.

"Aw, oppa! Didn't you miss me?"

Without any hesitation, Min-jeong hugs me.

"I missed you. Of course I wanted to see you."

I hug Min-jeong back and with reply with my greasiest voice possible,

"Hey, you guys! Getting along real well!"

Seeing this, Hyun-ji yells in anger and Min-jeong and I giggle.

"Separate, you two!"

"I want to separate too but..."

Min-jeong's eyes twinkle as she talks.

"His strong chest won't let me go. I can't separate myself."

I burst into laughter.

It's a parody of the situation with Hyun-ji at the club.

Eventually, Min-jeong gets dragged off by the ear from Hyun-ji.

"Anyway, what are you doing at our house?"

"We have a group project. And I wanted to see you."

Min-jeong hits on me again and gets a low kick from Hyun-ji.

"Give me food."

Says Min-jeong to Hyun-ji.

Hyun-ji looks surprised.

"What do you mean food? Just finish the project and go."

"Aw, but it's dinner time. I can't think right when I'm hungry."

"Are you hungry 24 hours a day, 365 days a year?"

"Aww, come on."

"Who are trying to act cute with?"

Min-jeong continues to nag to be fed and eventually Hyun-ji stares at me.

"Oppa, food."

"..."

"Make some food while we work on our project. You can do that much for your baby sis that's getting ready for employment, right? Haha, thanks a bunch."

Hyun-ji goes into her room with Min-jeong. Min-jeong blew a kiss as she went in.

"Food that you personally prepare, I look forward to it."

"..."

Soon after, I can hear the two girls chatting away from their room. Their voices are cheerful and animated, and it doesn't seem like they're talking about school.

'I guess I'll cook.'

I sigh and head into the kitchen.

Since there is a guest, I guess I can't just take out whatever?

I search the fridge for something tasty and discover a tenderloin steak.

I put three pieces of meat on the frying pan and grill them when I suddenly think of Kasa.

'Should I ask the fire spirit to cook it?'

"Kasa."

-Hek hek hek! (panting sound)

Kasa appears, excited to see me. I put my finger to my mouth and tell him to quiet down. Kasa nods his head.

"Can you cook this meat for me? Not all the way, just barely raw."

Kasa nods his head and makes three tiny balls of flame and shoot them at the frying pan. The balls of flame absorb into the meat.

Hwa lu luk!

I turn the fire off the gas range and slightly cut the meat with scissors to see how done it is.

'Huk!'

It's surprising how well cooked it is.

The inside of the meat is cooked softly, the juices held in just as is. More than anything, this took an instant. This will be really beneficial when hunting and cooking.

I set the table and call Hyun-ji and Min-jeong.

"It's so tasty, oppa. I think I'm falling for you."

"Stop hitting on him."

It was a pleasant meal, with Min-jeong's joking and Hyun-ji's bickering. Min-jeong and I repeatedly exchanged expressions of affection, but we just kid and she doesn't seem to sincerely like me either.

By the time Min-jeong heads home it's nearly 10 pm.

"I'm going. You'll do the presenting?"

"Alright, bitch. I'm not seeing you out, yeah?"

"Aw no, won't you escort me to the bus stop? It's gotten so dark and Min-jeong is scared."

"What did I say about the acting cutesy? It's annoying, get on home."

Hyun-ji shoos her away as if shooing away a fly. Min-jeong pouts her lips and then looks at me.

"Oppaaaa~."

"Huh?"

"Min-jeong is so scared. I wish a strong man with abs would escort me..."

"Poor you. I guess I have to take you. Let's go."

"Gyak, oppa, you're the coolest!"

Hyun-ji looks at us chatting and giggling and her eyes raise up and go cold.

"Oh? I said don't make a something-something between you!"

"Oppa, let's hurry!"

Min-jeong blatantly hooks her arm into mine. I become her escort and head out of the house. We leave Hyun-ji in a wild rage and get onto the elevator together.

We're in the elevator and going down and our arms are still linked.

Min-jeong suddenly asks me.

"Oppa, what are you thinking about?"

"Timing when to unlink our arms."

Min-jeong giggles.

"Oppa, I think you're hella funny."

"I've heard that a lot. I've never meant to be funny but people keep saying I am."

Every time I talk, Min-jeong laughs out loud. Just seeing her react so well to me, a man can easily be swayed.

The way she acts with guys, I can see how she is friends with Hyun-ji.

"Oppa, lower your speech."

(TN: speak to her with informal language.)

"Okay. You want to too?"

"I don't want to."

"Why?"

"Cause then I'll just be like a close younger sister."

Yoo Min-jeong says that and makes a captivating smile.

For a moment, I think my heart will stop. I had to try my hardest not to show it. Whether she knows this or not, she just continues to be happy go lucky.

'I can't fall for it.'

Min-jeong is just half-jokingly hitting on me.

If I fall for it, I'll just be a fool.

Thank goodness the elevator doors open up and I smoothly take out my arm.

"Shall we go?"

"Okay."

We come out the apartment and head towards the bus stop.

Suddenly, at the apartment's front parking lot, some men in black suits appear.

'What is this?'

They kind of look like the gangsters from a third rate movie.

Anyway, I don't feel good about it and walk faster. Min-jeong must feel uneasy about it too because she walks faster too.

But the men come towards us.

They clearly have some business with us.

'No, maybe they have something to do with me.'

It's not some cheap gangster movie, there's no way they suddenly appear in groups and just harass a passing man and woman.

To do such a thing, the suits and shoes of the men look too fancy.

'Are they from the Korean Arena research center?'

From their attire and disciplined walking, they look like they are with some formal

organization.

They keep coming towards us but they don't call to us or say anything.

They are sending me some kind of message. To send the girl off and meet in private.

I talk to Min-jeong.

"Min-jeong, you can go on your own now, right?"

"Op, oppa."

"Go on."

"No, I can't. Oppa, let's go together"

Min-jeong looks frightened. I think she thinks I'm going to fight them.

"It's okay. Don't worry about me."

"Should I call the cops?"

"No, there won't be a need for that."

Min-jeong hesitates and I gently push on her back.

"Okay, go home. There's no need to worry."

"I'll call you. Be careful."

"I will. Get home safe."

Min-jeong looked back a couple times and then dashed off.

Then I turned around and looked to the men.

Chapter 49

Chairman Park Jin-seong (Part 1)

“What is it?”

I say first.

To show I am not cowering, I come out strong but in reality I am not fearful.

The men come closer to me but I don't bat an eye. If I wanted, I have the means to kill them without a trace.

And practically speaking, there's no chance of just brazenly committing a crime in the middle of the street.

Among the men, a sharp-looking middle aged man walks out as the representative and bows his head to me.

“Hello. I apologize for coming around unannounced.”

“Are you from the research center?”

“No.”

The middle-aged man hands me his business card.

Jin-seong Electronics, 3rd Chief Presidential Secretary, Lee Jung-shik.

I'm completely surprised.

Jin-seong Electronics is a leading conglomerate in Korea with the highest sales of the country's businesses.

“I assume you've come knowing who I am?”

“Yes.”

“Did you get my details from the research center? That’s a bit off putting.”

“I do apologize for that. But this isn’t something that is all that bad for you so I hope you are not too offended by it.”

“I’ll decide whether I get offended or not, but first, tell me what it is you want.”

“Could you come with us, please?”

“Tell me what it is first.”

“I think that’s best if you heard it directly from the chairman.

Chairman?

Does he mean, no way, the head of Jin-seong Group, Chairman Park Jin-seong?

What would this country’s greatest millionaire want with me?

Even though I am an examinee, it’s not like there’s only one or two of us in the country. And amongst them, I am only a third exam rookie.

This only grows my suspicions of these men even stronger. I feel tense, thinking maybe they are lying.

“I don’t want to have a conversation after getting dragged somewhere in the middle of the night like this. That’s too one sided.”

“But the chairman is calling.”

“You’re not talking about the chairman Park Jin-seong of the Jin-seong group, are you?”

“That is him.”

“...”

I’m at a loss for words.

“That man is calling on me?”

It makes no sense.

I'm really feeling uneasy about who these guys are now. It might be a sinister organization that plans on using me, an examinee, by luring me into a trap.

Who is to know that they won't kidnap me, then threaten my life in exchange for me bringing them back majeong from Arena?

When I am called into the Arena and doing my exam, my body in real life is asleep.

If in the real world, my life is being threatened, there is no choice but to do as they want.

I speak.

"This doesn't seem appropriate. I would like to meet in the bright of day in a location I am familiar with. I am suspicious of you saying you are from Jin-seong Group, and it's so unbelievable that Chairman Park Jin-seong would want to meet me that this all almost seems ridiculous."

"If you would come with us, you'd see. We are in a position where we have to follow the chairman's orders as well, so please understand."

"Sorry about that, but that is your position."

"If you come out like this, it complicates matters."

Chief secretary Yoo Jung-shik's voice turns a little domineering.

I follow his lead and fiercely stare back.

"So what? You'll kidnap me?"

"...well, of course not."

"And? What, if someone calls, I just have to go?"

"..."

"Do you not know who I am? Don't you know what an examinee is?"

“I am well aware.”

“So what are you relying on in behaving like this? You want to get killed without a sound?”

“I apologize for offending you so. We have been polite and respectful...”

Yoo Jung-shik returns to his former demeanor.

“Then politely screw off. Well then.”

I quickly turn home.

But as I do, the other men stand and block my way. Like professional instinct (like they've done it before, its part of their job).

And I instinctively punch.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

One of the guys grabs his chin and falls down.

I kick the other guy in the shin and he stumbles.

“Kuk!”

The shin-kicked guy loses his balance and falls down too.

I'm surprised at myself.

My fist and foot naturally extended themselves. I felt no awkwardness in my movements when I attacked the two men.

“The effect of reflexes!”

Its proof of the effects of the reflexes I gained from the skill synthesis.

I casually make my way through the both of them.

Then, I hear the hasty voice of Yoo Jun-shik behind my back.

"Then when should we return for you?"

"Tell the punk to come himself!"

I yell rudely and return home.

There is a reason I came off like that.

'Because the other side was on the offense too.'

If they know where I live, they must know my contact information. Even so, they didn't contact me first and just showed up out of the blue. Then they say I have to go with them. That was their plan all along to have me just go along with it.

That's why I roughly refused and when they blocked my way, as if I was waiting for it, beat them and came out on top. It should be enough of a warning to them that I cannot be had so easily.



Yoo Min-jeong was hiding in the side of the street with just her head poking out, watching the whole thing.

In one hand, Min-jeong was holding a smartphone with the number 112* already up on her screen, ready to press call at any moment.

(TN: Number for the police in Korea)

He is her best friend's real oppa and not knowing what might happen to him, it turns out she wasn't so disloyal as to abandon him and save herself.

But watching it all in secret, an unbelievable scene unfolds itself and Min-jeong's face is in a daze.

'Jin-seong Group? Chairman?'

People that say they are from Jin-seong Electronics.

But really, their neat clothes and shoes and hair, the men look elite, not like some good-for-nothings.

People like that came to respectfully escort Kim Hyun-ho.

Saying that the chairman is calling. There is no doubt that that chairman means chairman Park Jin-seong.

And an even more surprising scene followed.

Kim Hyun-ho fell them down like a bolt of lightning.

Then he called the legendary chairman Park Jin-seong 'that punk' and left and the other men couldn't stop him.

'What kind of man is Hyun-ho oppa really?'

Min-jeong was suspicious.

From what she heard from Hyun-ji, he is a pitiful man whose life revolved around the civil exam and belatedly returned home.

But when she really saw him in person at the club, he was unlike what she had pictured him to be, bold and confident and it was refreshing to see.

But this Hyun-ho she just saw is shocking.

What kind of person is he that people from Jin-seong Group had difficulty dealing with him, and chairman Park Jin-seong is calling him?

'What the hell? Who is Hyun-ho oppa?'

The inside of Min-jeong's head was full of Kim Hyun-ho.

An important man that the Jin-seong Group is looking for.

A bold attitude with no fear.

With a strong body he suppressed two men in the blink of an eye.

Min-jeong felt her heart pounding. She's seen more than a fair share of men saying they're the best, but she's never met a guy like Kim Hyun-ho.

Min-jeong stares at her smartphone.

She cancelled the 112 dial screen and instead, opened up the messaging screen.



"Why are you coming back so late?"

I come home and Hyun-ji stares at me coldly and fiercely.

"Why do you think?"

"Eek! What? What did you do?"

"Spring has come for your oppa!"

"You wanna die? Didn't I say Min-jeong is off limits?!"

"La la la~ what an enjoyable life~"

"Kyak! I can't take it! Don't you know what kind of girl she is, get your head on straight!"

After teasing Hyun-ji plenty, I go into my room.

Zing.

My smartphone vibrates. It's probably a text from Min-jeong. But of course.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, did you get home safe?]

[Me: Yep^^ Did you worry about me?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Of course I did. I hesitated so long about whether to call the police or not T_T]*

(TN: A crying face. T_T is another way of doing it)

I felt good hearing that she worried about me. There's no way to not feel good that a pretty girl was worried about me.

[Me: Haha I told you it wouldn't be anything.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Who were those people?]

[Me: I don't know. They came looking for the wrong person. We just parted way uneventfully.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: That's such a relief ㅠㅠ I was so anxious worrying about you]

[Me: Thanks for worrying about me^{^^}]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Oppa, what are you doing tomorrow?]

[Me: Tomorrow I have a meeting with a friend. Why?]

Those people may come back for me tomorrow so I reply like this.

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: I said I'd treat you to a meal. Do you have time Friday evening?]

'Oh?'

No matter how I look at it, this is a date.

I didn't know she would actually ask me out and not just poke as a joke.

'What do I do?'

[Me: Friday evening?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Yea]

[Me: Sorry. I don't know what is happening that day.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^{^^*}: Oh...]

[Me: I'll let you know when will work.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Okay^^]

I'm sure she got it.

I put down my smartphone and collapse into bed.

I was somewhat interested in Min-jeong but it was nothing sincere.

She is Hyun-ji's best friend and it would be uncomfortable to casually go about it.

More than that, I am not in the mindset for it.

Joon-ho, Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong...

I sacrificed three people and returned home alone.

How could I return to reality and think to meet a woman and live and enjoy a sweet life.

At this time, won't Jun-ho and Hye-su's families be sobbing at the random tragedy that has struck them?

I bury my body in my blankets and close my eyes.

I have decided to test out my new skills at night on the mountain but I don't have the will. I think I'll just rest tonight.



The next morning, I quickly wash up as soon as I wake up and go on a hike. I jog at a quick pace up the longest hiking course.

Currently with the physical buffer entry level 5 at the limits of human physicality, this kind of exercise actually does nothing. But I do it to keep myself from growing idle.

I only pause for a moment at the top of the hike and immediately turn around and come back down.

But when I get to the start of the hiking trail, there are people waiting for me.

A black Benz* is parked far away and the men in black suits from yesterday are waiting for me.

(TN: A Mercedes Benz is very rare in Korea. It shows just how incredibly rich he is.)

And a familiar looking old man from the news is slowly coming towards me.

The old man looks like a good person and smiles at me.

“Haha, hello?”

“...Hello.”

I begrudgingly reply. I’m completely taken by surprise.

‘For real, its Chairman Park Jin-seong?!’

I for sure had yelled ‘tell the punk to come himself’ last night.

So he really came?!

Chairman park Jin-seong smiles as he talks.

“I apologize for yesterday. That was not my intention.”

“That is alright. My behavior wasn’t good either. It was just so unbelievable...”

“Can you believe it now?”

“Yes.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong has come himself, how could I not believe it.

“What about breakfast?”

“Not yet...”

“Oh good. Let’s go together.”

“Yes.”

I get into the backseat of the Benz with chairman Park Jin-seong.

With a smooth engine sound, we depart together.

Chairman Park Jin-seong is next to me, wearing a leisurely expression.

Chapter 50

Chairman Park Jin-seong (Part 2)

“We are going to my mountain cabin in Chonchon county, how does that sound? It’s a small summer house in the backwoods so there aren’t any people.”

Asked chairman Park Jin-seong.

I nod my head.

“Yes, if it is with you.”

“Haha, and why is that?”

“Excuse me, but because if need be, you will be the hostage.”

At my words, chairman Park Jin-seong laughs aloud.

“You are a clever fellow. I like that.”

“It’s an honor.”

The guys in the driver and passenger seats must not like that, because they look uncomfortable.

The car takes the south road for about an hour when we arrive at our destination.

We come to a narrow mountain road in the city of Jincheon-gun in Chungbuk and stop at its end where the summer house is.

The guys up front got out first and open our doors.

“This is my summer home.”

Surprisingly, it’s an average summer home. He is the chairman of a large corporation so I was expecting some grandeur.

“Why did you build a summer home in a place like this?”

I ask out of curiosity.

Chairman Park Jin-seong just smiles.

“It’s a hunting preserve. And right now is the hunting season.”

“Oh...”

“Even up to last year, I would come every year and spend a few days hunting. I thought I wouldn’t be able to make it this year.”

With a happy face, chairman Park Jin-seong heads towards the house.

From the house, another man, about the same age as the chairman, comes out. He is an older man with an adequate build for maintaining the summer house.

Chairman Park Jin-seong opens his arms wide and speaks.

“I’ve come again, my friend.”

“Oh my, chairman!”

“What chairman. Just call me by name, I said.”

The groundskeeper rushes towards chairman Park Jin-seong for an embrace.

“Chairman! I thought you couldn’t come this year and I was worried.”

“Tsk, you heard about that too?”

“Yes. I worried so much after I heard.”

“You must’ve heard it from my son. It’s always the case, you must go when it is time, don’t worry.”

“Hu hu huk (crying sound)...”

“Aigo, why are you crying, friend? Prepare for hunting.”

“Yes, yes.”

The old groundskeeper headed inside, and chairman Park Jin-seong looked to me and asks.

“Do you know how to hunt?”

“Yes.”

“We can do breakfast casually while we hunt. How about it?”

“That is not a problem.”

That's all I did in the Arena.

The old groundskeeper comes out with rucksack stuffed full of something, two rifles, and a good-sized shepherd dog. It looks to be a trained hunting dog.

I take over the rucksack and it is pretty heavy.

When chairman Park Jin-seong hands over one of the shotguns to me, I shake my head.

“I have my own gun.”

“Oh, indeed?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong takes his rifle and ammunition, and the German shepherd's leash, and heads out to hunt. He halts the guys who want to follow along.

“We will go just the two of us, so stay here until I call for you.”

“Yes, chairman.”

“Okay, let's go.”

“Yes.”

And like that, we began hunting.

The richest man in South Korea, the protagonist to the greatest success story,

chairman Park Jin-seong, hunting, just the two of us.

Looking at chairman Park Jin-seong who is trekking hard up the mountainside, I am overcome by an odd feeling.

“You seem tired, will you be alright?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong sits on a rock and catches his breath.

“My body is broken now so this is what happens from a little hike. Tsk, I was lively even up to last year, this is just the end.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong’s face shows signs of lonely regret.

Seeing that, only one thought crosses my mind.

That conversation with the groundskeeper earlier, and chairman Park Jin-seong’s request...

“The business you have with me, it’s about that as well, isn’t it?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong grins.

“You are indeed clever.”

“Not really.”

It’s probably a terminal disease.

To overcome a disease that cannot be treated with modern medicine, the final method, he has chosen the Arena.

He is invested enough in this method that he has come to see me, a rookie examinee, personally. He probably has the information that I have a main skill very different from everyone else.

“Now that no one else is here, would you mind showing me your gun? I would like to see it.”

“Yes, weapon!”

The Mosin-Nagant appears and I grasp it in my right hand. Perhaps chairman Park Jin-seong has met many other examinees and is used to it, because he doesn't look a bit surprised.

Instead, chairman Park Jin-seong, when he sees my Mosin-Nagant, his eyes that had been drowning in anxiety, suddenly liven up.

“Wow, that’s a Soviet Union gun! Let me see!”

As I hand over the gun, chairman Park Jin-seong becomes like a kid getting a present.

“Wow, it looks nice. Even though this thing is older than I am.”

“Do you know guns?”

“Of course! I’m am a huge gun maniac. I started hunting because I loved to shoot. I’ve collected a lot of rifles and revolvers at my California summer house. I have a Russian and Finnish Mosin-Nagant too.”

Guns must indeed be a man thing.

Chairman Park Jin-seong inspects and touches the gun all over.

“But did you not have enough Karma, is that why you are using this old-fashioned gun?”

“Yes.”

“You should hurry and gather enough karma and switch to an automatic.”

“I would like to do that too.”

“Haha, anyway, what should we do? My body condition is worse than I thought so I don’t think we’ll be able to hunt. Darn, I really wanted to shoot...”

“Then we’ll hunt quickly. Will you be able to walk an hour or two?”

“That much. You think it’s possible?”

“Yes. Sylph!”

-Meow?

As Sylph is summoned, chairman Park Jin-seong's eyes grow wide.

"What is that?"

"It's a spirit."

"Spirit? Ah, a spirit summons? That's why they said you have a special main skill."

"Yes."

I order to Sylph.

"Tell me where the closest living animal is, please."

Sylph nods her head and quickly disappears. A moment later, Sylph returns and points to the left with her front paw. Then she draws a number 174 into the ground.

"Is it a rabbit?"

Sylph shakes her head.

"Deer? An elk?"

Sylph keeps shaking her head.

"Wild boar?"

Then, Sylph nods her head.

I speak to chairman Park Jin-seong.

"She says it's a wild boar. Let's go."

"Okay."

We walk together and chairman Park Jin-seong continues to stare at Sylph, perpetually interested.

I give Sylph another order.

“Get rid of all our smells and noise.”

-Meow.

From then on, our footsteps couldn't be heard.

Chairman Park Jin-seong is even more amazed.

Then Sylph points to the front.

I look ahead, hiding my body behind a thick bush, and I see a wild boar. He's a rather big bastard, and he hasn't caught on to our being there.

“Would you like to shoot?”

“I would. Leave it to me.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong aims for the wild boar with his rifle. Just in case, I aim my Mosin-Nagant on it too. If chairman Park Jin-seong misses his shot, my plan is to shoot the boar before it has a chance to run away.

But I didn't need to.

Puk!

The rifle goes off and blood explodes from the boar's thigh. Due to Sylph's noise elimination, the shot made no sound.

To the faltering boar, chairman Park Jin-seong sends another shot.

Puk!

This time, the body.

The wild boar died just like that.

“Yeah haha! We did it!”

Chairman Park Jin-seong is so ecstatic he could jump. He didn't know that he was still capable of hunting in his dying from a disease body.

"That hunting could be this easy, a spirit is incredible."

"Yes, it is incredible, Sylph sure is."

At my compliment, Sylph taps my cheek with her tail and plays aegyo.

"Damn, I don't think we'll even need the sandwiches we brought. How about this for our meal? The summer house old man is really good at cooking this kind of stuff."

"Let's."

"Hold on a second. I'll call my guys to come fetch this boar."

"No, I can just take it."

"Huh? This big of a boar?"

I approach the dead wild boar. I grab its back legs and chuck it over my back. This several hundred-kilogram wild boar is lifted effortlessly. Thanks to the physical strength buff entry level 5.

"You must have mastered the physical strength buff. This level, is this about an entry level 4?"

"This is level 5."

"Really? Wow, you are now a third turn, your progress is fast."

He is neither an examinee or research center employee but he knows a lot.

It is evident, how much interest chairman Park Jin-seong has in the Arena.

I carry the boar and we return to the house and the summer house is excited.

Chairman Park Jin-seong's entourage and the summer house groundskeeper as well, are astonished.

“Oh my, you caught a wild boar?”

“Haha! How’s it? For an oldie counting down today and tomorrow’s, this is pretty impressive, isn’t it?”

“Ah, you are incredible, chairman!”

“Hahaha, no, no, this fellow caught it. We haven’t had breakfast yet, so cook this for us, hurry.”

“Yes, of course. You must be starving. I’ll take care of it right away.”

The old man begins to skillfully dissect the wild boar.

He splits the belly and after taking out the innards, slits the ankles, and with the help of chairman Park Jin-seong’s entourage, he takes off the hide. Looking at how skillfully the old man does it, I stare on in awe.

Chairman Park Jin-seong talks about it as if complimenting himself.

“Truthfully, that old man is the real master of hunting. Even if I didn’t send him his checks every month, with a gun and a dog he’d probably eat really well still.”

“Yes, seeing how he is working that boar, it doesn’t look to be his first or second time.”

I’ve worked on several animals while in the Arena to see that the old man is extremely skilled in this.

After a long while, we can finally eat. With the freshly caught boar, we grilled some of the meat with a spicy sauce. Like chairman Park Jin-seong said, the old man is a killer cook.

Eating with a corporate chairman, I thought it would be somehow luxurious, but this isn’t bad either. Not to mention, it would have been burdensome for me to eat at a formal high end restaurant anyway.

Seeing how he even enjoyed our hunting together, I think chairman Park Jin-seong wants to carry on an amicable relationship with me.

When we finish our meal, the old groundskeeper hands us each a glass of red wine.

“Thanks. We’re going to talk, just me and him.”

“Yes.”

The old man and the entourage leave.

In the summer house front lawn, it is just me and the chairman.

Chairman Park Jin-seong takes a sip of his red wine and savors it, then opens his mouth.

“What is the most important thing in this world?”

“Life.”

My answer has no hesitation.

With a satisfied expression, chairman Park Jin-seong nods his head.

“Yes. That answer has to come immediately. When you get that question, nothing else, like money, can cross your mind.”

“I agree.”

“You know why I search for examinees, and why I am interested in the Arena?”

“Yes.”

“I am like you guys. I am trying to live. When a person is born, they will eventually die, but I am still alive, so until my eyes close, I will try to live.”

“...”

“So, I will ask you point-blank. Do you think there is a way to cure my illness?”

“Maybe. There is a healing potion to treat wounds, so wouldn’t there be some kind of item to cure disease as well?”

“As far as I know, there isn’t. That answer is from asking many examinees and as of yet, no one has a result. The Arena has things to fixing wounds, but nothing for making

illness better. That world is far behind ours in medicine.”

“...”

“But the one hope I have is in a skill.”

“A skill?”

“Yes. That healing potion is made through magic. Like that, my hope is that there may be an examinee with a skill that heals illness.”

Wait, a skill?

As I hear that, skill synthesis runs through my head.

...but how?



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